

SEXTON BLAKE STARS IN TWO THRILLING STORIES

# DETECTIVE

Weekly 2d



A LONG COMPLETE STORY EVERY THURSDAY.

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A knife stuck quivering near to Blake's hand as he bent forward to seize the vital document that would give him the clue to Gentleman Gerald's loot. Then the lights went up and Zenith stood in the doorway with a gun in his hand, covering all in the room.

## The CASE of The GREY ENVELOPE

★ BLAKE IN A BLACK-OUT ADVENTURE  
WITH ZENITH THE ALBINO

### A Price On His Head

OFFICERS home on leave had been having a reunion at a West End hotel. The party was breaking up, and one of the civilian guests, having shared in a rather boisterous farewell, had left the scene of festivities with a young captain of Artillery. "Is it wise," he was saying pleasantly, as they

moved towards the Green Park—"is it wise for you, my dear friend, to expose yourself in my company? You have entertained me royally. You, and our friends back there, have refused to recognise me for what, unfortunately, I am. I thank you. Already you have taken great risks. Take no more of them. Turn back at once before some wandering policeman looks me in the face and remembers that there is a price on my head."

"Nonsense, old chap. We're very glad you turned up. Hang it all—I know your record in the old days. We'll pick up a taxi in a minute."

The officer glanced about him as he spoke, and the man in evening dress shrugged his shoulders.

He was a remarkable man. He wore faultless clothes, and his English was perfect. Yet there was an air of recklessness about him that was not altogether English. In his speech, too, there

was something that hinted at the blood of some foreign aristocracy.

He was volatile, and always present was his sense of the dramatic.

For this man was known as Zenith—Zenith the Albino. And he was wanted by Scotland Yard. He was, in fact, a prince of crooks—a man who, owing to some kink, preferred to be on the wrong side of the law.

"You're not frightened of the Yard?" queried the young Artilleryman.

"No," replied Zenith. "But there is one fellow—a man named Sexton Blake, of Baker Street, a private detective. He is a good chap, but he is out to get me. And he will get me, or else—"

"Or else, your Highness?"

The man in evening dress held up a white and shapely hand in protest.

"Please," he said, "if ever I had any claims to be other than a commoner, I have forgotten the fact."

"You're a queer chap," said the officer. "Any-way, we've had a jolly good evening, and it's been good to see you again." He held out his hand. "You should be able to pick up a taxi here," he added, "though it's so dashed dark they'll probably never see you."

Zenith returned the other's warm handclasp.

"Yes, it's been good to see you chaps again," he said, in his rich voice. "But I must return now—to the underworld where I belong."

The two parted, and Zenith strolled along through the black-out till he should be able to pick up a taxi.

It was typical of his daring that he was quite undisguised. With his pallid face and pink-irised eyes he might have been recognised by any policeman even in the black-out.

Having reached Piccadilly Circus, he picked up a cab and gave the driver an address in the neighbourhood of Hackney.

For him the gateway to the underworld was the international thieves' kitchen known as "Smith's," and the fact that he possessed the entree to that place would have informed any member of the police force, or any member of their natural enemies—the populace of crookdom—that he, Zenith, was a man of some standing in a nefarious profession.

As usual, he dismissed the taxicab some distance from his actual destination, and then, proceeding on foot, turned into a tall, old-fashioned house within a quiet street.

He opened the door with a latchkey, passed through to the basement without having occasion to use his torch, and then threaded several long corridors which sloped downwards, always downwards, after the fashion of a rat-run.

At the last door he used a pass-key—which was, in truth, the hallmark of his importance in that place—and then stood under an arc-lamp while he endured the scrutiny of someone he could not see.

It was, of course, Old Man Smith himself behind that peephole in the curtained wall—Old Man Smith, who knew every crook in Europe, and who never forgot a face.

Then a rat-faced man, dressed like a valet, uttered an apology and frisked him for a weapon. Thereafter he was handed a mask, and pushed his way through swing doors to meet the familiar atmosphere of the thieves' kitchen.

There was to-night some kind of a cabaret show in progress, and tables had been cleared from the centre of the great room to allow space for the artistes.

As Zenith sank, with a sigh of relief, into a solitary chair, one of the waiters, without question, placed before him his customary drink—a tumblerful of neat brandy.

It was a polite fiction at Smith's that the masks, which were in common use, prevented the recognition of the wearers.

Certainly, in some cases, it was so; and that triflfe of disguise may have been very useful to men who were comparatively unknown, and desired to remain so.

Monsieur Zenith, however, because of his colourless hair, his pallid face, and firm lips, might as well have dropped his mask under the table. He was unmistakable.

That fact did not worry him in the least, however.

The police knew Smith's, and tolerated it, because it was convenient to them.

There was no doubt that, even within the precincts of the kitchen, there were gentry of the type known as "stool pigeons," and the information which they brought when, at the risk of their lives, they had talked with the frequenters of that place, was undoubtedly the reason for police toleration.

As to raiding, Smith's had been raided half a dozen times, and would be again; but it was the boast of Old Man Smith that no police raid ever brought off an important arrest.

Of actual entrances to the kitchen, there was only one—the one where he himself sat and acted as scrutineer. Of exits there may have been twenty; and, as fast as the police set a watch upon one, it became disused and was replaced by another.

While Monsieur Zenith sat there sipping his brandy and smoking one of the small brown cigarettes impregnated with opium which were necessary to the repose of his soul, he became aware that a girl, who was sitting at a table some small distance away, had conceived a sudden and deep interest in himself.

Like himself, this feminine frequenter of the thieves' kitchen was solitary. The small silken mask which she wore accentuated, rather than concealed, the fact that she was beautiful. She also seemed very young.

When Zenith became aware of the interest taken in himself, he turned to meet a pair of dark eyes which were, or seemed to be, expressive of invitation.

The albino looked reflectively into the amber depths of the brandy within his tumbler.

Lone wolf that he was, he had many enemies in addition to those of the police, and it seemed to him that here was a situation which might mean danger.

His peculiar abnormality was rather terrifying to women; and, even his extraordinary poise and elusive attractiveness could not enable them to forget that he was an albino; yet this dark-haired young girl, criminal though she might be, unmistakably desired better acquaintance with him.

She offered for his inspection a considerable length of silk stocking, and her glance, when again their eyes met, was full of coquetry.

The albino was cynical enough to suppose that there might be some motive behind this allurement, other than the obvious one of attraction and, realising that by so doing he was playing with fire, he rose and walked across to the girl's table. To play with fire was one of his weaknesses.

"Pardon me," he said, in his golden voice, "you are alone? This show, I fancy, bores you a little. May I join you at your table?"

"Just as you like," said the girl.

But Zenith was not deceived by the casual reply.

She had hooked her fish. She could play him at her leisure. Zenith resolved to be played, but not necessarily to be landed.

A couple on the floor were dancing the apache dance, and the green spotlight, which is an essential part of this performance, so accentuated the strange coloration of the albino that he looked like a man of marble.

His slender fingers outstretched upon the table-top appeared as delicate as those of his companion.

In a West End club, in a pukka Continental ball-room, these two would have fallen into place as part of the picture. Astonishing, certainly, but at home.

In the thieves' kitchen, where every grade of crook from a sneak-thief to a con-man was received, they stood out like birds of paradise among a flock of pigeons. Without seeming to do so Zenith studied the girl minutely. It was evident she was youthful. Yet keen judge of character that he was, the crook realised that she was no innocent young thing. The hard set of the mouth, even the glances she gave him through her mask, indicated that she was not in the place for pleasure alone.

But Zenith was willing to take any risks.

"You know me?" he asked. "I am Zenith. Zenith—he hesitated—"the Albino."

"I think I've heard of you."

Her statement did not ring true. It was too careful, like a speech rehearsed. Zenith was convinced that she knew exactly who he was.

"This girl," thought Zenith, "has been sent

here to obtain my confidence! What's the game? It will be interesting to find out."

It seemed that he would discover something before very long.

The girl was intimate, provocative.

Intentionally, or otherwise, she had forgotten her original coldness, and was now leading him on at a great pace.

Watching his step with great care, the albino humoured her, meeting her more than halfway. It was obvious to him that she was vampirising him—and that she, young as she was, had had a good deal of practice.

The apache dance came to an end, and the murmur of applause, which was the utmost approval ever accorded by "Smith's lambs," died away.

"That," said the albino, drinking his brandy, "was not the apache dance. You and I, is it not so, could dance the thing as it should be danced?"

"You may be right," agreed the girl.

She seemed now only anxious to agree with the albino in everything; but she was not prepared for the next move.

"You think," he said, "that you could dance that dance with me and do it as it should be done, with Fate in your two hands, and death stalking in your tracks? Then, by Jove, you shall!"

He rose to his feet.

"One moment!" he said, and his powerful voice filled the great room from end to end. "I am Zenith. I will dance for you."

With a gesture he lifted the mask from his face and laid it on the table. As though mesmerised by his glance, the girl did the same. Then Zenith offered her his arm and led her out to the middle of the floor.

"You will play that thing again," he told the leader of the orchestra.

And once more the music began.

As he took the girl in his arms to begin the dance, the albino laughed aloud.

Drink had little or no effect upon this man. His potations of the evening, the opium-soaked cigarettes which he had consumed, had raised him, as it were, to normal; but the music, the excitement of the battle of wits in which he was involved, had given him a feeling of exhilaration.

### Zenith's Bargain

ZENITH THE ALBINO danced a few bars with the dark-eyed girl in his arms, a slow, gliding step, to which she responded perfectly. Then, as they drew near to the orchestra, he stopped and uttered an apology.

"Just one moment!" he said.

The orchestra was perched on a raised platform.

The albino took this barrier in a stride, and snatched the violin from the hands of the leader.

"When I dance," he told the man dramatically, "I want music!"

The violinist attempted some protest.

Zenith turned his blazing, red-irised eyes upon the orchestra.

"Now," he said, "we will play the first bars again. You are playing like automatons, men of flesh and blood."

He gave them the tempo, and then himself began to play.

It was wild stuff—half improvised, half inspiration—but he got them going.

When again he returned to the floor and held out his arms to his partner, the music of Smith's second-rate orchestra had a message for every man or woman in the purloins of the kitchen.

With his cheek against his partner's, they danced the first motif through. By then they were both completely lost in the dance.

The apache dance performed by these two was a very different thing from the one put up by their predecessors.

An apache dance was a thing which "Smith's lambs" were able to appreciate, and there was a breathless silence more eloquent than any applause.

They made an end by a repetition of the love dance. And it was here that a member of their audience attempted to turn what had been only a melodrama into a real tragedy.

His rush was sudden, and Zenith's limited area of vision prevented him anticipating the movement until the last moment.

The knife, which glittered in the man's hand,

and which by some means he had carried past the scrutineers, was raised in the air above the girl's shoulder, when Zenith hurled her aside and crashed his fist into the assassin's face.

The man fell, and within three seconds Smith's, which had been the scene of many fights, was witnessing yet another.

The would-be assassin, a heavy man with curling black hair and a broad face, had friends, perhaps belonged to a gang; and before even he had regained his feet after Zenith had knocked him down, his friends rushed to his assistance.

The lights went up, and although this gave the quick-moving Zenith some advantage, the number of his enemies, and the fact that he had stood alone on the open floor, placed him at a disadvantage.

He had turned his back to the girl with some instinct of protection, and was hitting with both hands into the excited knot of men around him, when another of the attackers, who also possessed a knife, doubled up and went down with a cry.

Zenith was surprised.

He had been aware of the threatened knife-thrust, but when the man fell he had been beyond reach of the albino's hands.

"Good!" chuckled the girl's voice close behind him. "The walking-stick is not a rapier, but it does its job!"

The end of their dance had brought them to the spot from which they had begun; and the girl, seeing Zenith's ebony stick resting against the chair, where also he had deposited his hat and coat upon entering, had snatched it up and used it as a weapon.

Knowing that, with her behind him, he could not be surrounded, Zenith attacked his remaining three assailants with that cold ferocity which was characteristic of him.

The remaining knifer, the dark man, received a swift kick upon the elbow which disarmed him, and a terrific upper-cut which almost dislocated his spine.

The other two were literally dazed by the speed of the albino's attack; and, had Zenith wished to fool them for the amusement of Smith's, he could have done so indefinitely.

At present, however, it did not suit his mood.

His left hook landed exactly upon the man's ear, and the foremost fell groaning upon his face.

The other was cross-buttocked and slammed down to the boarded floor.

Being too dazed to know where he was safest, he attempted to rise; and a right swing put him out for the count, and then some.

"Pretty work!" said the girl. "That was beautiful. You know how to scrap."

"You, too," said Zenith, and rubbed his knuckles tenderly. "Nevertheless, one is defiled by contact with these cattle. I should be glad to know if you are able to tell me the meaning of the attack which that fellow made upon us."

The dark-haired girl looked him in the eyes, and laughed softly.

"Sure I can," she said. "But let's go to our table, where we can talk."

"Well?" asked the albino, when they were seated. "And the meaning?"

She paused a moment before she replied, and then murmured the single word:

"Jealousy."

"You mean," responded the albino, "that he was jealous of me?"

The girl shrugged her shoulders.

"Looks like it! That dance of ours got his goat."

"And the man," pursued Zenith, turning his back disdainfully upon the subject of their conversation. "he is an acquaintance of yours?"

"No," declared the girl; "he's an enemy. He would rob me if he could."

"An enemy, and yet he is jealous?"

"Yes. He's just crazy."

She hurried on as if she had suddenly made up her mind to a confidence.

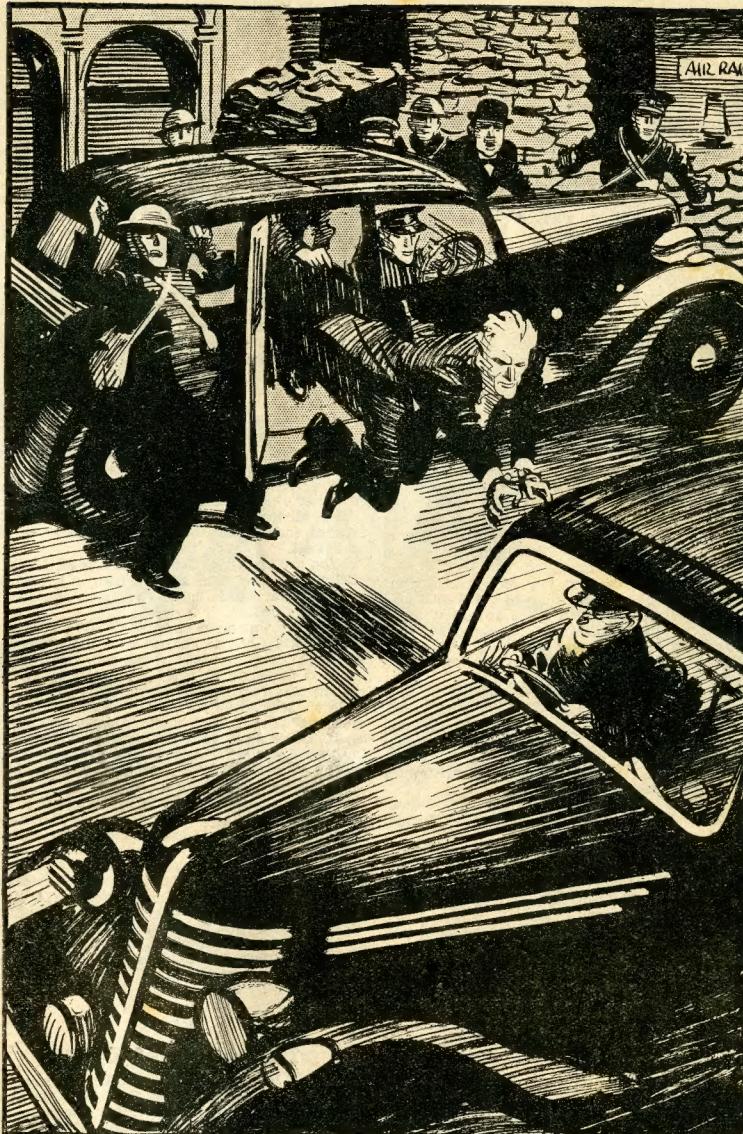
"Listen," she said, dropping her voice. "I did you a good turn just now. You'd have won all right without my help. But, anyway, I did help."

"That's so," agreed the albino.

"Then, because of that, I wonder if you would do me a service. It's something that only you could achieve."

The albino's eyes, half covered by their long white lashes, regarded the girl's lovely face with cold attention. He suspected that now he was about to learn the reason for which she had cultivated his company.

A vainer man would have supposed that it



Surrounded by police, Zenith entered the Flying Squad car. But he had observed the oncoming vehicle and in a moment had flung open the off-side door. Then, handcuffed as he was, he sprang clear and landed on the running board of the passing car. It was a daring bid for freedom. Would it succeed?

was because she found him attractive. But Zenith had no doubts as to her character. She was a gold-digger—probably had got mixed up with a gang almost as a child.

"I have told you," she went on, "that the man who tried to attack me, wants to rob me. It's like this."

She went on to tell him about a letter of hers which was in the nature of a confession. It proved her right to a famous name, and on the death of a relative she would inherit a fortune.

"And those on the other side have gone to desperate lengths to obtain the letter?"

The girl nodded.

"Three months ago a gunman—Bowery George is his name—had a chance to kill me, but he didn't take it. He thought he could get the letter without that. Well, he got it in his hands, and I—I fought for it. Half went with him, and half remained with me."

"Now you know what I am asking you to do. Without the other half of the letter—the half which is with Bowery George and his friends—I can prove nothing."

The girl paused, and then, using all her allurements, added:

"If I tell you where that letter is, will you get it for me?"

The albino was smoking one of his tiny brown cigarettes.

He let the smoke trickle between his lips, and watched it as it drifted upward, to be lost in the murk of the ceiling.

He turned his head to where the dark-haired man, who had interrupted the apache dance, was sprawling white and shaken in a chair.

"And that fellow?" he said. "Where does he come in?"

"He and his friends," explained the girl, "are all in the racket. They don't know what's in my half of the letter. That is why they are afraid of me. That is why they will not stop at murder to get what they require!"

"And yet," suggested the albino, "you say that that fellow is jealous of me?"

"That's so. He's fallen for me. He's even made me a secret offer to steal the other half of my document from his boss."

"And you refused?"

"Yes; I refused. If I make a bargain I keep to it; and in that case, I did not see my way to keeping the bargain that he proposed. That's all."

Monsieur Zenith smoked in silence. It rang true, all this.

If it were acting, if somewhere it were designed to entrap him, then he was deceived as seldom before; and yet he knew, almost beyond question, that from the first moment their eyes had met at Smith's Kitchen—possibly even before that—the girl had had it in her mind to entrust him with the adventure which she now proposed.

Was the proposition what it seemed, or was there a catch somewhere?

And then, out of reckless curiosity to get to the bottom of the affair, he decided to go a little farther.

"You had better tell me, I think, who you are, and where this document is to be found."

"I," with a shrug of her slim bare shoulders, "have several names. The one which is mine by right doesn't matter. Surnames are not so popular at Smith's. I'm usually called just Rita."

"And the letter?"

She paused.

"Before I tell you of that, Monsieur Zenith, I must know whether you are going to help me."

The albino nodded.

"Assuming," he said bluntly, "that everything you have told me is true, and that your proposition is what it seems to be, I will get you the other half of the letter; but"—and his red eyes blazed in his white face—"those who played me false have hitherto regretted the fact."

Rita rose languidly to her feet, her slender fingers resting upon the edge of the table, and looked down at him with what appeared to be contempt in her dark eyes.

"You insult me!" she declared. "I'm not lying, and I don't lay traps for my friends. Good-night!"

Zenith smoked in silence.

She turned away, and yet he made no move. He was testing her genuineness. If her declaration were made in good faith, if this indignation were not acted, she would go.

If it were only a bluff to maintain an imposture, she would return.

She walked six paces from the table, then, swiftly, as if on the spur of an impulse, turned again to face him.

There were tears in her eyes, and her fingers were twisted together as if in anguish. At that moment she looked very young and girlish.

"No," she said desperately, "I can't let you go! I must have your help."

Zenith, by his stratagem, had proved, if he had proved anything, that the girl was playing a part—that there was more to it than she had led him to suppose. But, watching her tearful face, he doubted the correctness of his own conclusions.

In any case, he could not endure the spectacle of that beautiful face convulsed in grief, and he made there and then a sudden decision which was to prove momentous.

"Sit down again, Rita," he implored. "I have decided to help you."

Rita dabbed her eyes and again drew a chair to his table.

"I think I can trust you," she asserted. "I'll tell you the rest and then get away. It's terribly risky being here at all."

"This document which I want—the other half of the letter—is locked in a small safe in an upstairs room at No. 11, Backlington Place, near Sloane Square. Will you remember the address—No. 11, Backlington Place?"

"The safe is hidden in the wall paneling. The room is in the front of the house, and the safe is behind the third panel on your right-hand as you face the windows."

"The tenant of the house has taken every precaution against theft. There are burglar alarms to every window, and he and his menservants are armed. You won't have an easy job."

"And the name of the man?" put in the albino. "The man in whose possession this document now is."

"Purvis," Rita told him. "Edgar T. Purvis."

"And the document?"

"Is in a grey envelope, inscribed with the words: 'Strictly private and personal.' It lies in the upper part of the safe and upon the right-hand side."

The albino nodded, and held a match to another cigarette.

"I will meet you here," he promised, "exactly one week from now."

"And by then," said Rita excitedly, "you will have the letter?"

"Either that," said the albino, "or I shall not meet you here."

On a sudden impulse Rita placed her left hand on his shoulder and offered him the other. "I'm sorry," she said, "that I have nothing to offer you but my thanks!"

She turned and left him without another word, and he, seeing that his late enemies were sufficiently recovered to make another attack, put on his coat and sauntered towards the exit which it was his custom to use. He had no fear, it is needless to say, of the men who had attacked him; but a certain distaste for renewing a struggle with some scum of the gutters was sufficient to cause him to leave their neighbourhood.

Owing to the black-out, his silk hat and modish garments did not make him conspicuous in that part of London. But he would not have cared if they had. He did not hurry, but sauntered along, swinging his stick and musing upon the problem of the strange dark-eyed girl and the enterprise which he had promised to undertake.

He had not gone very far when the light from a torch shone out, and to his astonishment he saw the girl herself coming towards him.

She was some distance away when two men stepped out from some recess before a shop-front or a factory, and ranged themselves one on either side, each focusing his torch upon her.

The albino slowed down and watched with interest for the meaning of the incident to unfold itself.

"You are known as Rita?" said one of the men.

The street was silent at that hour of the morning, and the words came clearly to the albino where he stood.

"I arrest you on a charge of—"

The details of the charge were inaudible, but the fact that his late companion was being arrested appealed to the latent chivalry in the soul of the albino.

He walked slowly forward.

"Aha!" he said, with suave impudence. "That is, if I mistake not, the excellent Inspector Coutts! Dear me! And Inspector Harker, also. Well met, gentlemen! How is—"

He got no farther.

Whatever the charge against Rita, she was evidently unimportant compared with himself. Two torches revealed his imposing figure in their beams.

The detectives released her on the instant, and made a combined rush in his own direction.

Having succeeded in his object of creating a diversion, the albino swung round to make good his own escape, but, as he did so, a large car drew up immediately behind him, and he found himself surrounded by the powerful and resolute officers of the Flying Squad.

"Got you by all that's holy!" shouted Inspector Coutts.

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### The Arrest of Zenith

**W**HEN Monsieur Zenith, turning to make his getaway after he had offered himself as a decoy to Inspectors Coutts and Harker, ran right into the arms of the Flying Squad, he must have known from the first moment that he was in a position of real peril.

They were picked men, these of the Flying Squad, and what made it doubly dangerous, knew Zenith too well to risk anything.

With that extraordinary speed which was part of the albino's physical make-up, he struck with both hands at the oncoming men.

One of them was so far groggy as a result that he was compelled to sink upon his hands and knees upon the pavement.

Another received a flush hit between the eyes which marked him for many days afterwards, and yet another tripped over a projecting sandbag; but the rest carried Zenith in their rush back to the railings which edged the pavement and held him there with desperate force.

Counting Inspector Coutts and Harker, there were still seven men on their feet, heavy men in good condition and fully alive to the difficult proposition they were tackling.

So overwhelmingly, indeed, was their hold upon their prisoner that the albino laughed aloud.

It was at such moments as this that there was mirth in his laughter.

Although arrest to him meant death, it brought with it no fear.

Life had so little value that he was prepared to go out of it with a gay smile when the time came.

"Upon my word, gentlemen," he chided, "you are not giving me much elbow-room."

"And I don't intend to!" rasped one of the men.

Several times before in their experience Monsieur Zenith had been at their mercy almost as much as now; and yet it was a known fact that he had never seen the inside of a prison cell.

They dragged him across the pavement to the police car, and his powerful, delicate-seeming wrists were confined in regulation handcuffs.

Arriving at the door of the car, a member of the Flying Squad entered, then Zenith was bidden to get in, after which he would be followed by as many men as could be crowded into the confined space of the car.

"In you go!" ordered Inspector Coutts.

Zenith hesitated.

In the distance, and coming towards them, he could hear the approach of a car bringing some late reveller home from the West End.

The car came nearer.

"Just a minute!" objected the albino. "Am I to understand—"

"You are to understand," Coutts told him, "that I want you to enter that car—pronto. If you don't do it willingly, you will be made to do it otherwise."

Their prisoner, measured with his eye the distance from himself to the dimmed lights of the approaching car, and then, with a shrug of his shoulders, passed in through the open door of the police vehicle.

But he did not stop there. Instead, he leapt past the man inside and opened the farther door. Then, handcuffed as he was, he sprang clear of the police car and gained the footboard of the private vehicle which was passing.

Its speed was not over the limit, but as he hung with his manacled hands to the door-handle he was flung back against the coachwork with a force that almost knocked the breath out of his body.

His reckless laugh came to the ears of the detectives.

There was a revolver-shot, a shrilling of police whistles, and a grinding of gears as the police car turned and started to follow him.

The occupants of the car which Zenith had boarded had both seen and felt his arrival upon their footboard, but their chauffeur, occupied with his driving, remained for some moments unaware that he had acquired an extra passenger.

Inside the car were a man and woman, both young, and the man, being a law-abiding citizen, obeyed the urgent summons of the police whistles by rapping on the glass panel as an order for his driver to stop.

The driver, supposing his passengers wished for some reason to alight, ran into the kerb and slowed down.

Zenith did not wait until the private car had come to a standstill.

It was still moving alongside the kerb when he jumped clear and, hatless and bruised, with hands chained together, he ran full speed to the first side street that he came to.

The black-out was all in favour of Zenith, whose abnormal eyes could see like a cat's in the darkness. Once out of the rays of the pursuers' torches he was invisible to them.

He ran through a network of quiet streets, taking almost every turning that he came to, and maintaining his onward progress solely by a sense of direction.

The fact that each of these turnings meant that he was compelled to traverse two sides of a square, of course, exposed him to the danger of running right into the arms of any of the police officers who had maintained a straight course.

This risk he was obliged to take, but, by taking it, he made his pursuers scatter. But they were still hard on his trail.

When at length the inevitable happened and they were both in front of and behind him, he was opposed to two or three men at most.

Needless to say, the quick-witted Zenith perceived the police officers just one jump ahead of the moment when they should have perceived him.

He had hardly seen the bulky figure of a pursuer turn into the road where he was and



came towards him when he had pushed open a gate and disappeared up some stone steps which led to the front entrance of a house of considerable size.

He stood still for a moment upon the tessellated pavement at ground level, and then, thinking it unlikely that his pursuers would pass without observing him in the light of their flashing torches, he walked slowly up the steps and into a doorway.

He had hoped that there would be recesses in which he could shelter, but in this he was mistaken.

The porch offered no protection.

Looking round, with something of the swift desperation of the hunted wild creature, he saw, almost level with the porch, the broad sill of a bay window.

He stepped from his exposed position within the porch on to this sill, with the intention of rounding the bay and taking shelter against the brickwork on the far side, but even as he did so he observed that one of the sash windows of the bay had been left, by accident, unfastened.

Even as the heavy footsteps of one of his pursuers became audible upon the stone-flagged pavement not far away, he bent and raised the sash, and then stepped lightly into the warm obscurity of the room within.

It happened that the sash opened easily and as, in entering the room, he had the good fortune not to knock against any piece of furniture, the albino hoped that, so far as the inhabitants of the house were concerned, no alarm had been given.

Quickly and silently he closed the window, and then, sheltered behind the thick black-out curtain, watched first one and then another of his pursuers pass the house.

For two or three minutes he waited in an attitude of strained attention; and then, taking a last look at the room which had given him shelter before making a further attempt at his get-away, he revolved slowly until he was facing a reverse direction.

There was a fire still burning in the grate a few yards away, and the air was heavy with the perfume of an excellent cigar.

He became aware now for the first time that the room was not unoccupied.

Within an armchair at the far side of the fireplace, and facing him, was the vague outline of a man's figure; and as he watched, the red end of a cigar glowed and glowed again.

There was a man in the room who had ob-

As the wild dance ended the black-haired man made a sudden rush at the couple. A knife glittered in his hand as he raised it above the girl's shoulder. Zenith's curious eyes gazed into those of his rival and saw no mercy in them.

served his entrance, and yet had remained so indifferent to his intrusion as to continue smoking in silence.

What did it mean?

If the unknown was untroubled with nerves, so, also, was the albino.

"I beg your pardon, sir," he said smoothly, "but I did not observe your presence. I sincerely apologise for entering your house in this unseemly fashion, but I assure you that my necessity was urgent."

He was answered by a thin, wheezing voice which was in queer contrast to his own.

"I imagine—uh-h'm, yes—that you are at this moment wanted by the police. Am I—uh-h'm—right in my assumption?"

"Perfectly right," was the albino's reply.

"I think, moreover," pursued the almost invisible occupant of the armchair, "that I—uh-h'm—detected the clink of a chain. Is it possible that you have the misfortune to be handcuffed?"

"I have that misfortune," said Zenith shortly.

"Uh-h'm, yes. You are wanted by the police, and you are handcuffed. Uh-h'm, that is indeed unfortunate."

"May I know," questioned Zenith, "what your attitude is likely to be? You will, I imagine, take the steps which are usual in such an emergency."

"As to that," said the other, "it depends—yes, it all depends."

"Upon what, may I ask?"

"Upon who you are. It seems to me—I may be wrong—but it seems that your hair is white; that—uh-h'm—your eyes are red in the firelight. Is it possible that you are an albino?"

"I am."

"It seems to me, then, that you may be not only an albino, but *the* albino. I refer to—uh-h'm!—Monsieur Zenith, as they call him."

"I am called by that name."

"You are called by that name. And what do you want with me?"

"I want nothing, sir, but that you should answer the question I have just put. What is it your intention to do? That is all."

"You surprise me. You do indeed surprise me. Do you expect me, Monsieur Zenith, to believe

that your entrance to this house is entirely accidental?"

"I do, sir. Why should you suppose otherwise?"

"Uh-h'm!" the other laughed. "That's telling, Monsieur Zenith. If you are perfectly ingenuous in your statement—"

"Indeed—"

In the albino's voice, when he answered, a new note had come. He was not accustomed to having his veracity questioned.

The fact that he was hunted and handcuffed did not make him less dangerous.

"Indeed," he said icily, "when I say that my entrance here was accidental, I intend you to believe me."

"Upon my word, I am inclined, strange as it is, to believe you. And you have come here, to this house, by accident? Well, well, this is coincidence. Uh-h'm, yes, this is coincidence, if ever there was coincidence."

Zenith fumbled in his pocket and, despite his manacles, succeeded in lighting a cigarette.

"You imply," he said, "that there is some connection between yourself and me of which I know nothing?"

The man in the armchair laughed wheezily. "M'yes," he said, "there is some implication of that sort, is there not? Well, I may be wrong. Very likely—uh-h'm—I'm wrong; but one thing is quite clear—it would not suit us at all if you were rearrested just now. We must take steps to get you out of those handcuffs. I'm afraid I am no hand at picking locks."

"You don't need to be," Zenith assured him. "If you will be so good as to cut or break one of the links of the chain between them, I will soon get my hands out."

The unknown rose to his feet.

"Wait here, if you please," he said. Silhouetted against the firelight, he revealed himself as a stout man, very broad and very round-shouldered.

He waddled away to the door, and the sound of his footsteps betrayed that he was descending the stairs which led down to the basement.

Within a minute or two he was back again, and came forward, breathing heavily, to where the albino stood.

"Now," he said, "where had I better cut?" Zenith stretched out his hands, and the fat man adjusted a pair of large and powerful shears. He squeezed the two handles with a grant of effort, and the blade cut one of the thick steel links as if it had been cheese. He

was adjusting the shears again to make a second cut, and so completely sever the chain, when the gate creaked upon its hinges, and a heavy step approached the front door. There came a loud knock and the flash of a torch.

"The police, I think," said the fat man. "You had better step out by the back door."

Preceded by his host, Zenith stepped into the dark hall and walked quickly through to the tradesmen's entrance at the rear.

"Down the steps," wheezed the fat man, "and along the full length of the garden. Better not use your torch. The door at the far end is unfastened. I think—uh-h'm—that we shall meet again."

"And to whom—" began the albino, curious as to the identity of the man who had saved him.

But the other pushed him gently towards the head of the steps.

"Not now," he said, "another time." And the door closed behind the albino so silently that even he did not hear the lock-bolt go into place.

Carrying his steel-manacled wrists, still confined by the half-severed link, in front of him, Zenith walked swiftly down the length of the garden and opened the door which had been formed in the thickness of the wall at the rear.

Beyond the door was a narrow passageway, which led to left and to right. It was undoubtedly a means of access for those who brought coal, or cleared the household refuse, and so narrow that two persons could not easily walk abreast.

The albino stepped out into this passageway, and was closing the door behind him, when he felt a hard object from his shoulder-blades, and the voice of Inspector Harker said:

"Put 'em up, Zenith!"

The albino was trapped!

### The Warning of Old Man Smith

**W**HEN Monsieur Zenith suffered the disagreeable experience of finding Inspector Harker's pistol barrel jabbed between his shoulder-blades, he did not make the mistake of offering resistance; instead, he raised his hands obediently into the air, and awaited the commands of his captor.

These were soon forthcoming.

Harker was alone in the narrow passageway, but with the master-crook right upon the muzzle of his pistol, he felt reasonably confident of completing Zenith's removal to the police station.

He calculated, however, without the fact that the chain which confined the albino's wrists was now incomplete.

"All right," he said gruffly, "you may drop your hands, and quick march up to the car, which should be somewhere right against the end of this passage."

Zenith obediently walked forward, but from the very moment that he was told to drop his hands he started to work the broken link off the one which joined it.

Within three paces his hands were free, and now he moved his free right hand up his back as he walked, and seized Harker's pistol by the barrel.

His chances of deflecting the weapon, so that a bullet did not pass from it into his body, were about one in three, and even this calculation allows for the phenomenal quickness of the man.

But Fate was with him.

Harker had not even supposed that it would be necessary for him to fire, and his finger, although resting on the trigger, was not tensed to activate it.

His surprise at finding Zenith apparently possessed of more than one pair of hands was such that he was deprived of his weapon without any alarm being raised.

He sprang forward instantly, of course, but the albino stopped his rush by an open hand upon the face, and batted him into unconsciousness with his own pistol-butt.

He fell in a heap; and Zenith, dropping the revolver, coolly stepped over his prostrate form and made his way through a maze of passages to a point some hundreds of yards distant.

Doubtful of his ability to pick up a taxicab in that place at that hour, he sought sanctuary by returning to Smith's Kitchen.

Once there, he knew that he was reasonably safe from pursuit, and safe also to have his handcuffs completely and capably removed.

Smith's, of course, was still in full swing.

Most of its clients were night-birds.

"I want," said the albino, "to see Old Man Smith."

He had made the request to one of the servants of the place, and the man, recognising the criminal eminence of the one who gave the order, disappeared forthwith in the maze of corridors and private rooms which lay all around the underground kitchen.

Old Man Smith was not at the beck and call even of Monsieur Zenith, and the master-crook had time to order and consume another modicum of his favourite beverage before his order was obeyed.

"Come this way, if you please," said the servant. And Zenith, following him, found himself in a small room, hung on every side by curtains and containing merely a writing-table and two chairs.

In one of the chairs he seated himself, and the servant withdrew, closing the door behind him.

A few minutes elapsed, and then the curtains parted, to admit a man so old that his frail, withered limbs could hardly support the weight of his slight frame and of the large, fleshless head which seemed to grow directly upon his shoulders without the conjunction of a neck.

His face and head were alike hairless. His loose, slavering mouth betrayed brown and broken teeth, and his rheumy eyes were surrounded by a network of deep wrinkles, and sunk an incredible distance into his skull.

This frail body was a servant of a criminal brain. Old Man Smith was a living encyclopaedia of crime—a human rogues' gallery.

It was said that he knew by sight every criminal in Europe, and it is certain that a face upon which he had once looked was never forgotten by him. Zenith evinced his respect for this remarkable personality by rising to his feet and offering a chair.

"Mr. Smith," he said formally.

"Monsieur Zenith," responded the old man, and lowered himself carefully into the chair which Zenith had offered.

"To-night," said Zenith, coming without preliminaries to the matter which had caused him to summon the old man—"to-night, in your kitchen, I met a lady who is known as Rita. You will perhaps have the goodness to tell me who she is?"

"Names!" expostulated the old man. "I know nothing about names—not me! Faces! yes! But names—no! Names are changed so easily; faces never—not really, that is! Of course, disguise. But go on—go on!"

Zenith described the girl.

"All that," complained the old man, "is nothing. I will find a hundred women to fit that specification in any night-club you like to mention. But perhaps I can help you. I think I know this Rita. But what do you want to know?"

"She has asked me to undertake for her an enterprise which will be, I think, dangerous."

"And you have promised to undertake this enterprise?"

"I have."

"Well, then, you are a man of your word?"

"Yes."

"Is there more to be said?"

"I have a curiosity," pursued the albino. "To-night, as you know, I was very nearly taken by the police. In making my escape I was befriended by a fat man who lives in a large house within half a mile of this place.

"He knew me, and implied that he and I were in some way associated. He used the words: 'It would not suit us at all if you were re-arrested just now.'

"As I can think of no enterprise in which that man and myself might be involved, unless it is the enterprise which Rita has pledged me to, I am curious to know where he comes in."

"In an affair of this kind I like to see my way, Mr. Smith, more clearly than I see it now. If I knew more of the lady—"

Old Man Smith drummed his fingers upon the writing-table.

"Did the enterprise, by any chance, concern No. 11, Backlington Place?"

Zenith nodded.

"You know, then?"

"Yes. I know almost all there is to know, and I regret most deeply, my dear Monsieur Zenith, that I am unable to give you any information."

Zenith would have expostulated, but the old man held up his hand.

"My principles!" he said. "My principles!"

Zenith rose and bowed, as an intimation that he was not going to press the point.

"Wait a minute," said Old Man Smith, still drumming his fingers on the table-top. "I can tell you nothing of the matter, but my principles do not prevent me from giving you a word of warning. Whatever colour has been given to this enterprise, however deeply you are committed to undertake it—"

He paused for such a long time that Zenith became impatient and prompted him.

"Well, don't undertake it," said Old Man Smith. "That is my advice to you. Don't undertake it."

Zenith laughed.

"Thanks for the warning! Thank you especially because it leads me to believe that in doing what has been suggested to me I shall be finding an adventure after my own heart."

"Maybe! You will find adventures, if it is adventures you are wanting. I bid you good-night, Monsieur Zenith!"

The albino turned on his way to the door.

"Just one thing," he said. "I imagine that you are in touch with the other parties to this conspiracy, or whatever it may be. If so, you will oblige me by repeating to them a brief message. It is this: I have been double-crossed several times, but not by men who are now alive to talk of it. That is all. Good-night, sir!"

Monsieur Zenith repaired to a private room in the building, and, his handcuffs being removed, attired himself in a long, black silken dressing-gown with a white cord.

It was a room, this, which had been rented and used by him for many years.

Upon his second return to Smith's Kitchen he had ordered a message to be sent to his Japanese confidential servant, and now the slave and sleepless Oyani was there to receive him.

"Fix me a pipe, Frank," said the albino. "Fix me a pipe one-time. I have had a tiring night, and to-morrow, when it dawns, will be a tiring day. Now for a little while I must sleep—forget."

Then, while his master flung himself full length upon the couch, raised only a few inches from the floor, Oyani brought to his side the stunted table, the oil lamp, the yen-hok, and the pipe.

"Three pills, excellency?" he murmured.

"Three will do," replied Zenith, and watched the yellow fingers that fashioned the opium pill and held it to the flame of the lamp until it was grown to the size of a cherry.

As the Japanese held the yen-hok over the flame, and the smear of opium expanded, the pungent fumes floated through the small apartment and gathered heavily beneath the low ceiling.

The Japanese kneaded the cooked pill, rolled it into shape, and stuck it into the tiny hole in the flat bowl of the pipe.

Zenith smoked, and to him came the forgetfulness and sleep which he had craved.

At ten o'clock on the following morning Oyani re-entered the room, bringing with him a large kitbag, which, in response to a message, he had obtained during the previous night.

From the kitbag he took a soiled frock-coat, shepherd's plaid trousers, and boots with cloth tops.

A high and frayed collar and a large black necktie were placed in readiness, and upon the larger table which the room contained was opened up an elaborate make-up box.

Zenith, still half awake, reached out a hand for the glass of hot milk which he knew would be awaiting him.

Then, with a shake as if to dispel the shadows of opium sleep, he threw himself into a chair beside the table and bade his servant get busy.

First, in preparation for the disguise which he intended to assume, the albino was carefully shaved, then his face was covered by cocoa butter and wiped clean with a soft towel. After that there was an application of No. 4 grease and delicate work with the liner.

The crown of his head was darkened by means of powder, and a small toothbrush moustache, formed from crepe hair, was fixed to his upper lip.

After that he assumed the various articles of clothing which Oyani had brought.

"Now," he said, rising and taking from the hands of Oyani a grey hat and a malacca cane. "I am going to the Cosmos for my breakfast. My name is— Confound the opium stuff! What is my name?"

He opened the cardcase with which his waist-



coat pocket was furnished, and looked at the pasteboard therein.

"Major James Gulliver. That's it! I am Major James Gulliver, and I am going to take my breakfast at the Cosmos, after which I have a call to make. You got the name I want?"

"Yes, excellency. No. 11, Backlington Place is occupied by a Mr. Purvis. He is a retired soldier—a respectable man, I should imagine. Dabbles with Stock Exchange operations and lives alone. He is reputed to be a widower."

"Thanks, Oyani!"

The albino placed a pair of tinted spectacles across his nose, and marched from the room with the stiff, precise carriage of the veteran ex-soldier that he was supposed to be.

The large kitchen, still lighted by clusters of electric lamps, was littered and disorderly; the orchestra had gone, and the air was rank with tobacco smoke.

The albino crossed the floor, disappeared through a doorway, and threaded numerous passages, which formed the one means of exit which he was allowed to know.

At the far end he found himself within a row of middle-class houses which communicated by secret doors one with the other, so that he could come to the street in a dozen different ways.

Without troubling to look to the right or to the left, he came down the steps of one of these houses, closed the gate behind him, and sauntered along in the morning sunlight until he could find a taxicab.

Rather foreign-looking, rather distinguished, and rather out-at-elbows, he represented a type which any man who knew the world could place without much difficulty—the retired Anglo-Indian living on half-pay.

The voice in which he told the cabman to drive to the Cosmos Hotel was high-pitched and nasal.

After he had breakfasted and smoked a cheroot, "Major Gulliver" hired another taxicab and caused himself to be conveyed to No. 11, Backlington Place.

He paid the cabman, crossed the forecourt of this somewhat pretentious residence, and knocked on the door.

His summons was responded to by a fat servant, and he was escorted to a sunny room upon the level of the street.

"My master," the servant informed him, "is, I think, breakfasting. I will take your name to him."

The gangsters rushed into the room to see a sprawled form half hidden by the heavy curtain. At the door stood a figure disguised in a cowl which they took for Zenith. Actually it was Sexton Blake, and key in hand, he was waiting to lock the door upon the deluded crooks.

"Thank you," said Zenith.

But he had hardly heard what the man had said; he was so occupied in trying to remember where he had heard that voice before.

Monsieur Zenith was not at his best on the morning after an opium sleep, and he was still puzzling over the matter when the servant returned with the information that Mr. Purvis would see him.

"Will you have the goodness," continued the servant, "to—uh-h'm—to come this way?"

That queer interjection—"uh-h'm"—brought complete recognition to Zenith in a single second.

This was the man who, less than twelve hours earlier, had given him his liberty in the house at Hackney—the man who had hinted that their paths were destined to cross; and now, although presumably the fat man knew it not, their paths were already crossing.

What was he?

How did he, a respectable, responsible manservant, come to be spending the night in a living-room several miles from his master's residence, as undoubtedly he had done on the occasion of Zenith's escape?

These questions were for the moment unanswerable; but of one thing Zenith was quite sure—the man was a crook.

Yet his bearing was perfectly correct, and his manner when he announced the visitor to his master left nothing to be desired.

Mr. Purvis was a middle-aged gentleman who, to judge by appearances, was not possessed of overmuch vitality.

"Good-morning, Major Gulliver! Pray forgive my apparent courtesy in remaining seated; but I am, alas, such a martyr to rheumatism that the least movement gives me extraordinary pain. Please take a seat and tell me what I may have the pleasure of doing for you."

Mr. Purvis' breakfast had been removed, and even while he spoke to his visitor he cast a wistful glance at a copy of a newspaper opened at the section which interested him most.

Evidently he had been reading with his breakfast, and as soon as his visitor had departed he would read again.

"Returning from India," said the supposed Major Gulliver, "where I had been paying a visit, I had the pleasure to make the acquaintance of a charming girl, who told me that she was a friend of yours, and asked me if I would convey from her to you her compliments and regards.

"As she herself was continuing to Paris without delay, she could not visit you personally; but asked me if I would take her place in so doing.

"The name of the lady?"

The albino paused.

Then he took two strides—extraordinarily swift and silent—from where he sat, quickly threw open the door, exposing Mr. Purvis' fat butler in the undignified position of one who listens at a keyhole.

"Pardon the liberty," explained the albino, "but the Oriental is a great victim to curiosity, and after long residence in the East one's suspicions are easily roused."

Mr. Purvis was looking with open-mouthed astonishment at the fat butler, who now stood, almost filling the width of the doorway.

"What does this mean, Prothero?" he asked.

"I beg your pardon, sir," replied the man-servant. "But if you will allow me, I will explain when—uh-h'm—when Major Gulliver had left us."

"Nothing of the sort!" snapped his employer. "You will explain now, Prothero. You are taking an unwarrantable liberty."

"I hope not unwarrantable, sir. It was only my devotion to your interests."

"Devotion to my interests? What do you mean?"

"We do not—uh-h'm—know Major Gulliver."

"I don't know what you mean," said Purvis, "and I don't want to know. Go away, and close the door behind you."

"Very good, sir."

The manservant retired.

"Now, Major Gulliver," resumed the invalid, "you were about to tell me of a friend of mine whom you had met on board ship. I must admit that my curiosity is aroused. I was not aware—But no matter. Who is this young lady?"

"She was called," said Zenith, "Rita."

The change which took place in the face of the other was astonishing.

His colour went, his jaw dropped, his eyes protruded.

He tried to repeat the name, but his throat refused its office.

For a full minute he lapsed into silence, struggling with his breath; and then suddenly he fell forward, insensible, his head falling, like the head of a tired child, upon the opened newspaper by his side.

Zenith rang the bell, and the man called Prothero hurried in.

Together they stretched Purvis upon the floor and loosened his collar.

His teeth were clenched, and his lips were blue. His breathing was like the breathing of a man who is suffering from a stroke.

Having questioned Prothero, and discovered from him that there were no other servants in the house, Zenith told the man to remain by the side of his master while he himself put through a telephone call for a doctor.

He found the telephone instrument within an alcove on one side of the hall, put through the urgent summons in a low voice, then hurrying along the hall to the front door, took his hat, stick, and gloves from their place, opened the door, banged it shut heavily, and then crouched down within a doorway in the hall which would conceal him if Prothero should happen to look out of the room in which he was watching his master.

The man did so.

His heavy step and heavy breathing were audible for a moment as he stared from his doorway along the passage, and then it was evident that he had re-entered the room.

He evidently supposed that Major Gulliver, not finding the doctor at home, had rushed out in search of one.

This was a point gained.

Still carrying his hat and stick, the albino ran silently up the stairs and turned into the bedroom to which the mysterious Rita had directed him.

To find the safe behind the panel took almost a minute; and, once he had found the safe, the old-fashioned combination lock did not present any great difficulties.

For three minutes he worked at the lock, trying series after series, and noting with his keen ear the faint click made by the mechanism within.

At the end of that three minutes he had opened the safe and picked up the envelope.

Rita's information had been astonishingly correct.

It lay exactly where she had said it would; and the inscription on the envelope was exactly what she had foretold.

As he was closing the safe, he heard the doctor's car drive up to the door and, knowing that in all probability he was safe from interruption for a further five minutes, he took a glance round the room in which he was.

It was obviously the bed-room of Mr. Purvis himself, and between the windows was a bureau at which the invalid was accustomed to deal with his correspondence.

Zenith selected an envelope which exactly matched the envelope which he had taken from the safe and, propping the original up against an inkstand, using Purvis' pen and Purvis' ink, then and there made a very capable forgery of the inscription of which Rita had informed him.

Having done that, he took a sheet of notepaper and padded out the imitation envelope until it exactly represented the original. Then he placed the two of them in his breast pocket, carefully noting, in case of eventuality, which was the one which contained, or was said to contain, Rita's letter, and which was the one containing nothing but a blank sheet of paper.

In this enterprise, which had turned out to be so astonishingly simple, he was working all the time in the dark and, as this was a state of affairs but little to his liking, he was taking extraordinary precautions in case things went wrong.

That things might, indeed, go wrong was made clear to him within the next ten seconds for, as he rose to his feet from the bureau, he came face to face with the fat manservant, Prothero, and in the hand of Prothero was an automatic pistol, around the barrel of which was clipped a grotesque-looking silencer.

"I think," said Prothero, "that you are, that you must be—uh-h'm—Monsieur Zenith."

"I am Monsieur Zenith."

"Then, monsieur, you will perhaps tell me whether you have yet succeeded in opening that safe?"

"I have done so."

"Then I will ask you to hand me the envelope which you took from the safe."

"And the alternative—what is that?"

"The alternative is that I keep you here in front of my pistol-barrel and call down to the doctor, who is still in the house, to summon the police."

"And if I agree?"

"Then—uh-h'm—I shall have no further use for you. I shall be very pleased to see you take your departure."

Zenith reflected.

The man was probably speaking in good faith for, if he had been moved to shoot in cold blood, he would undoubtedly have shot first and taken the letter afterwards.

The albino had no intention whatever of parting with the original document. Not even the threat of a pistol would have induced him to do this; but, if he could stall off the fat man by means of the forged duplicate, he was quite willing to do it.

"Very well," he said, with a shrug of his shoulders, "since you have got the drop on me, here is the letter you want."

He advanced with the letter in his hands, but the fat man waved him back.

"No, no!" he said, with evident alarm. "Don't come too near! Drop the envelope on the bureau behind you, and then walk past me out of the house. Remember, I shall be following you every step of the way and, if you turn, I shall shoot you, without compunction, as I have excellent excuses for doing."

Zenith dropped the envelope and, followed by the pistol of Prothero, walked jauntily out. The enterprise had been so elementary that he felt sure there was a catch somewhere.

There was!

### London Moses Intervenes

"YOU ask me whether I know this guy? I tell you right here that I don't. We were in stir together in little ol' Noo York, and he seems to know a lot more than is good for him about our business. That's all I've got to say."

The speaker was the thin, dark, almost boyish individual who was known as Bowery George, or otherwise as the Knifer.

He was credited, or discredited, with a large number of capital crimes; but the intricacies of American law had given him an unjustified freedom and, on this side, so far as the police knew, there was nothing against him.

He stood in the middle-class dining-room where Zenith had had his first encounter with Prothero, and he indicated, as he spoke, a deformed, black-haired man in green spectacles, who sat, like the rest of the small company, around the dining-table.

At the head of the table sat the man called Prothero—manservant no longer, now that his criminal ends were served—but master of the house, and leader of the small gang who were assembled there.

On his right was the dark-haired man in spectacles to whom Bowery George referred; and on his left, looking particularly attractive, is an expensive frock, was Rita.

On her right was the curly haired individual who had attempted her life in Smith's Kitchen and had been knocked out by Zenith. His name was Alfredi.

Prothero bent his eyes on his visitor, who had by some means induced Bowery George to bring him hither.

"We did not desire your company, my good sir," was his discourteous opening, "and now that you have joined us, here at the table, we don't like the look of you. Perhaps you will—uh-h'm—explain how you induced Bowery George to bring you?"

"Explain?" repeated the man in glasses. "Yes, I will do that, with great pleasure. Bowery did not give you my moniker, although he knows it. I am called London Moses. Bowery will bear me out in that, won't you, Bowery?"

Bowery George nodded.

"Yes. He's London Moses all right."

"So," continued the man in spectacles, "when I met Bowery George over on this side, I told

him what I knew, and he thought I might be useful to you, so he brought me along."

Prothero's stare was still completely hostile.

"You told him what you knew," he repeated. "What did you know—uh-h'm—that led you to believe that you would be welcome here?"

"I know," said London Moses, "what you are after!"

His remark caused a sensation.

The eternal fear in the mind of the crook that some confederate was not quite "safe" came like the touch of a cold hand to each of them.

Prothero was the first to recover.

"So," he commented. "And what are we after? Speak up! You are among—uh-h'm—friends."

"Why," continued Moses, "you are after the loot which was left behind by Gentleman Gerald when he was bumped off for croaking a watchman."

From these words on, London Moses became the centre of a strange attention and ominous silence.

"Continue," urged Prothero.

"Why, I don't know that there is anything else to say. If you want to know how I found it out, I should be happy to tell you."

"I was passing the house of Mr. Purvis," he continued, "the man who was once some big noise as a criminal lawyer—and I found, to my surprise, that his manservant was none other than our friend here—Mr. Prothero."

"Well, I know Mr. Prothero by sight, like a lot of other people, and I saw him looking out of Mr. Purvis' window. I knew then, of course, that Mr. Purvis had some knowledge, or some property, which our friend was after. What could it be that was big enough to tempt Mr. Prothero? Well, madam, well, gentlemen, the answer was easy."

"Purvis defended Gentleman Gerald, and I had no doubt that his price had been the secret of that big lot of loot which has never been discovered. Only guesswork, but, I think, good enough."

"As we all know, Gentleman Gerald did not confine himself to portable goods in his operations. He took things which most of us would never think of touching—pictures, carpets, musical instruments. All sorts of valuable things, portable or otherwise."

"We know what became of the negotiable stuff. That was converted by him into money; and for the rest, cherchez la femme—seek the lady, as the saying goes, but the other stuff, worth hundreds of thousands of pounds, has never been discovered from that day to this."

"That it is deposited somewhere in London, we all know; but the place was known only to Gentleman Gerald himself."

"Whether, before he was scragged, he passed the information on to Purvis, is a question which has always interested me, and when I saw Mr. Prothero at his window I found that Mr. Prothero thought that the question might be answered in the affirmative."

"Since then, my friends—why not?—I have taken an interest in your movements."

London Moses' words made a great impression on the gang. At first it seemed as if Prothero would have attacked him. But after some muttered conversation with the others he changed his attitude. This man already knew too much.

"We are going to trust you," he declared.

He went on, addressing the new recruit:

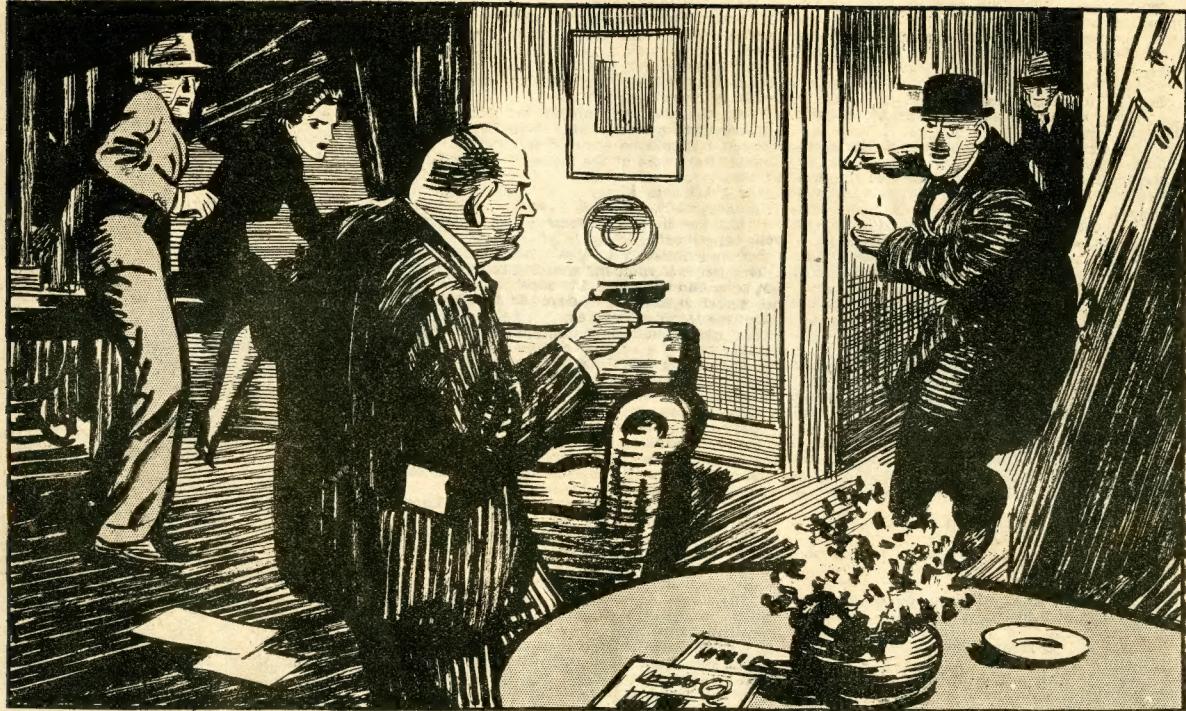
"You had better know what has happened. Your surmise that Purvis knew where Gentleman Gerald's stuff was dumped is perfectly true. He did. He kept the document containing the information first on his person and later in a safe at Backlington Place."

"While he carried the document in his pocket we had a shot at getting it; but Rita, who handled the affair, was unfortunate and obtained only a torn half. The remainder Purvis deposited in his safe, and without it we can do nothing."

"The document was in code and, although, after a little difficulty, we succeeded in reading it, we found that it contained only a part of the information which is necessary to enable us to put our hands on the stuff."

"Purvis did not know me and I got a job with him, very soon finding out where the thing was deposited."

"That, however, raised a difficulty. The safe which he was using was old-fashioned, but well made, and neither myself nor any of our



friends here was capable of opening it. Beside that, he had had his house fitted up with the latest thing in burglar-alarm, and was himself very wide awake indeed. Therefore, we were faced with a difficulty. To get over that difficulty we made a plan which was, in its way, something of a masterpiece.

"Rita, here, approached a personage of whom you will have heard, one Zenith—Zenith the Albino—and she obtained from him a promise that he would open the safe and bring her the document in question.

"The idea was that directly this man—Monsieur Zenith—had opened the safe, Purvis should be bumped off and the police sent for.

"We made arrangements to relieve Monsieur Zenith of the document, and then to hand him over to the police on a charge of having murdered Purvis.

"A beautiful plan, my friends, which would have given us everything we wanted. The document would have been ours, and Monsieur Zenith would have been in a position where he could not interfere with our use of it; but, unfortunately—uh-h'm!—things went wrong.

"By a series of accidents, Monsieur Zenith was able to get access to the safe at a moment when we were not prepared for him, and to obtain possession of the document.

"I was there and held him up all right, but he bilked me with a faked envelope, curse him!

"And that," he finished, "is how the matter stands. Zenith has got one half of the document, we have got the other. Each, by itself, is useless. Zenith will try to obtain our half, and we shall try to obtain his.

"What we have to do now is invent some plan by which we can lead him into a trap and complete our information as to the whereabouts of Gentleman Gerald's loot."

This, then, was the purpose of the meeting at Prothero's house, and with the help of London Moses, the gang proceeded to elaborate their plan.

When the meeting was over, the conspirators, one by one and at considerable intervals, passed out of Prothero's house and disappeared on their unlawful affairs and occasions.

London Moses walked thoughtfully as far as Kingsland Road, and there boarded a taxicab, which he instructed the driver to drive to King's Cross.

At King's Cross he descended and disappeared into a block of flats constructed for

The three crooks made a rush for the window as there came a tremendous crash behind them. Through the splintered door lurched Detective Inspector Coutts, of Scotland Yard, followed by Blake. Prothero turned on the instant and fired point-blank at Coutts.

the residence of bachelors and persons with small families.

He was so long about his business there that Mr. Prothero, who had taken the precaution to follow him, at length entered the same building to investigate the matter.

There the ex-manservant found, to his disgust, that the block of flats possessed a second entrance in a side turning, and that the man he was watching had departed some considerable time before.

London Moses had chartered another taxicab, and still another, before he arrived at a house in Baker Street which was the residence of a famous private detective.

He opened the door with a latchkey and climbed the stairs, taking off his green spectacles as he went.

"O.K., youngster," he said, to a well set-up lad who greeted him. "I had a near shave, but I am on to Gentleman Gerald's stuff at last!"

London Moses was another name for Sexton Blake.

### Swift Work at Smith's

**E**XACTLY a week from the date of Monsieur Zenith's first encounter with Rita, the dark-eyed girl herself sat in Smith's Kitchen, and at the seat where she first met him.

It argues much for the extraordinary reputation which the albino possessed in the underworld, that the conspirators who were seeking to trace the loot of Gentleman Gerald had unanimously decided that, since Zenith had promised to hand Rita the document which he had obtained, it was probable that he would do so—unlikely, in fact, that he would do anything else.

The fact they, on their side, had attempted to double-cross the albino, and that he, not being a fool, would be aware of the fact, did not persuade them that he would stoop to break his pledge—hence the appearance of Rita at the rendezvous. Hence, also, the appearance of London Moses, who sat at a table close by.

The presence of the supposed Jew had been a shock to Rita, as it had been arranged that she alone should keep the appointment; and she instantly assumed that London Moses was put there to make sure that she did not play her confederates false.

This, of course, was not the case.

The private detective had come to Smith's Kitchen, as always, at the risk of his life.

He had given the sign of a secret society, and had been accepted on that evidence, together with the evidence that he had the necessary latchkey to one of Smith's entrances.

Both the sign and latchkey had been given to Blake by a dying crook whom he had befriended, and the personality of London Moses had been stolen from a crook with whom Blake had come in contact during one of his American visits, and whom he afterwards heard had died in Sing-Sing.

"Do you think he will come?" signalled Rita, using the gesture language of penal servitude.

"Sure of it," signalled London Moses, and the two of them continued, as before, to pretend that they were complete strangers.

What Blake had signalled to the girl was fully believed by him.

The albino arrived dead on time.

With his eye for theatrical effect, he had covered head and shoulders with a garment like the upper part of the gowns affected by the Ku-Klux-Klan, and he bowed deeply before he seated himself at the table opposite the girl.

One of the servants of Smith's Kitchen, who had probably received an order to that effect from Old Man Smith, placed before the albino his customary tumblerful of brandy.

The albino waved him away.

"Take my drink to another table. I will be there in a moment."

This was a bad start, thought Rita.

If the albino detested her so much that he would not drink at the same table, then there was little chance that he would give her what he had risked his life to get.

Here, however, she was wrong.

"My business with you," said the albino, "will not, I think, occupy more than a few moments."

"You asked me to obtain for you the torn half of a certain document. As to the nature of the document, you—er—made a mistake. Nevertheless, I take it that the envelope which you described to me contained the document which

you required. Well, the envelope, with its contents, is in my pocket."

"Yes, yes!" cried the girl eagerly. "That's the one I mean! As to how the mistake occurred I—"

"It is quite unnecessary," responded Monsieur Zenith, "to offer explanations."

"O.K.," said the other, but there was a quiver in her voice.

The terrible, stone-white face of the albino being covered, as were also his head and shoulders, by the black sugar-loaf cape, she could see nothing of his expression, and she was almost glad of it.

The cold anger in those crimson-irised eyes made her shiver, even when she imagined it.

"Let us, if you please," pursued the albino, "get to business. I have the document. Well, what of it?"

"You're giving me the chance of getting this document?"

The albino inclined his head.

"Yes!"

"Good enough," said the girl. "The document means everything to me. I must have it. It is for you to name your price, to make your own conditions. Whatever they are, they shall be agreed to."

The albino thrust a hand into his breast pocket, withdrew the long grey envelope, and placed it on the table in front of his companion.

"I think," he said, "that you will find the contents intact."

"How d'you mean?" gasped Rita in astonishment. "That you—that you—"

"That I make you a present of the envelope and its contents."

"Not a present?"

"I place the thing within reach of your hand as casually as I should tip a waiter. It is of no value to me."

"And yet it means thousands of pounds—hundreds of thousands!"

"Not so. This half of the letter, like the other, is in code, and though I succeeded in decoding it, the information is useless. Together with your half of the document it may mean all that you say. Take it and do with it as you will."

The sophisticated girl valued his declaration at what it would have been worth if she had been the speaker.

"What he's going to do," she said to herself, "is to wait till I put the two halves together, and then pinch them. That's not on my programme."

The albino, without a word of leave-taking, was already rising to leave Rita when she snapped her slender fingers under the table.

It was the sign that Alfredi, concealed behind a column, had been awaiting.

He came up behind the albino as silent as a shadow.

"Look out!" said Sexton Blake.

The warning was instinctive.

In any case, the warning would have been given. It was not in Blake's nature to see even a crook murdered in cold blood, still less the albino, who had something left of the code of a gentleman.

It was as it happened, altogether instinctive, and Blake, forgetting for once in his life the role he was acting, uttered a warning in his own voice.

The albino did not wait to discover the cause of it; did not turn round to see from what direction danger was coming.

Had he done either of these things, he would have died before the minute was over.

Instead, he reacted with a speed of a coiled spring.

A sideways jump, and then, as Alfredi, knife in hand, blundered forward, a smashing undercut which missed only by inches the side of the Italian's jaw and caught him on the skull immediately above the ear.

The man was dazed, but his natural ferocity prompted him to make another attempt.

He staggered forward again with knife upraised, but the albino, entirely self-possessed, was completely master of the situation.

He seized Alfredi's right wrist in a grip which it was impossible to shake; and then, with his other hand closing over the knuckles which held the knife-hilt, made a quick movement which caused the would-be assassin to scream with pain.

The knife dropped to the floor, and Alfredi reeled backwards, thoroughly cowed.

"I think," said Monsieur Zenith unconcernedly to Rita, "that your friend has a broken wrist. It will teach him, perhaps, to be more careful. I will wish you good-day!"

He signed to the servant who, in obedience to his orders, had deposited his glass of brandy on another table, and passed across the floor to where the supposed London Moses, with a mask upon his face, and with his chin sunk between humped shoulders, was filtering water into a glass of absinthe.

"To you, sir," the albino went on, "I unquestionably owe my life. Whether for that reason I should be grateful or otherwise I am unable to be sure at the moment. Nevertheless, I thank you. Men call me Zenith the Albino. May I know to whom I am indebted for this courtesy?"

"Nothing to make a fuss about," responded the other gruffly; "and I didn't know as names were much in favour down here. However, I don't mind, if you don't mind. My monniker is London Moses."

"London Moses," repeated the albino reflectively. "You are, if I may say so, Mr. London Moses, a character-actor of some ability."

Blake knew from that moment that his disguise was penetrated, and he resolved to play for time.

Had he imagined that Zenith was alone, he would have gone for a knock-out, and taken his chance of walking from the room before the albino recovered consciousness; but in that place, Monsieur Zenith—or any other crook—was never alone.

There would be, perhaps, a dozen men watching them at that moment, each one of whom was perfectly willing to assist Monsieur Zenith when they realised that London Moses was actually Blake.

Even assuming the knock-out to be performed in a single blow—which was doubtful—the result would be a simultaneous attack by Zenith's friends.

What would follow was ancient history. It had happened before.

A gentleman, seemingly the worse for liquor, escorted by a taxicab, and, within a day or so, a body floating in the shallows over the Thames mud. A verdict of "Found drowned."

Blake knew all this, and in playing for time, he was playing also for his life.

"It is a pity," murmured the albino, "that I am indebted to you; but I'm afraid, my dear friend, that I cannot allow my sympathy to interfere with plans already made. You will agree, I am sure, that we are dangerous to each other; that, if I do not get you, you will get me. Fate has placed you in my hands, and, despite the debt which I owe, I am not disposed to spare you."

"This far, however, I will go. As you must have suspected, I am out for a big thing. I purpose to acquire the stolen property left by the late lamented Gentleman Gerald.

"Give me one week of freedom, one week of non-interference from you, and I shall continue to suppose that you are London Moses. Refuse, and I shall be led to suppose that you are Sexton Blake. What is your answer?"

Blake hauled the table aside, and hit with both hands at the black casque which covered the albino's face.

As if the act had been a preconcerted signal, at least a dozen men rose from their tables in the neighbourhood and converged upon him.

Zenith took a left-hand blow flush in the face which sent him reeling; but his vitality kept him on his feet and master of himself.

Blake turned and dashed for an exit.

It was impossible for him to reach, in the few seconds at his disposal, the door which formed his usual means of egress, and he was obliged to make for another exit with which he was unfamiliar.

He reached the first door some six yards ahead of the albino, who was the foremost of his pursuers, traversed a short passage, dived through another door to which the passage led, and found himself in a small room from which there was no other means of escape.

He was brought to bay.

"Keep back!" shouted Zenith to his friends, and passed into the room whither Sexton Blake had preceded him.

It had been a sore point with Zenith that he, unequalled in fighting by any man whom he had ever met, should find in Sexton Blake one who was, perhaps, his master; and the intrepid albino was anxious, here and now, to demonstrate to his followers that not even Sexton Blake could stand against him.

Obedient to his command, they held back; and when, within two minutes, the door opened,

they were overjoyed to see the tall figure in evening clothes and covered by the pointed casque, come out of the room. He pointed silently inside, where a fallen figure was half-hidden by a curtain.

Laughing among themselves, they passed into the room to gloat with him over his victory, while he courteously stood aside until they were all in; then he locked the door behind them, and walked quietly off.

The crashing caused by the breaking down of the door by Zenith's imprisoned gang should have warned Blake that his ruse had been discovered, and that there was no time to lose; yet when at length the infuriated men made their escape, they were astonished to see an individual wearing a black sugar-loaf mask lolling in a chair in the centre of the Kitchen.

Of Sexton Blake's courage and audacity they had already received convincing proof, but surely this contempt of themselves was unbelievable?

They rushed forward as one man.

The captive screamed as they touched his right arm; and when they snatched the mask from his head and shoulders it revealed, to their astonishment, the face of Alfredi, now bemused by the drink he had taken to enable him to bear the pain of his injured arm.

Zenith, walking unsteadily forward in the wake of his men, laughed with real enjoyment of the stratagem.

Sexton Blake, had had, in any case, reasonable time to make a getaway; and the delay he had obtained by diverting their attention to the drunken Alfredi had made things perfectly easy.

His encounter with Zenith within the room where afterwards he had trapped the gang was so brief as to be counted in minutes.

The albino, coming forward in an impetuous rush, had met Blake advancing, and—well, Blake had been the lucky one.

His terrific right-hand punch, with two hundred pounds of bone and muscle behind it, had taken Zenith fair and square upon the point of the jaw; and it was convincing testimony to the strength of the albino that so soon after the impact he was able to walk at all.

Hardly had the albino fallen when Blake had perceived that his only chance of escape was an impersonation.

London Moses, the man whom Blake was supposed to be, was known to have a fancy for glad-rags, and it so happened that Blake, like Zenith, was wearing evening-dress clothes.

The mask, and the difference in stature between Blake and the deformed London Moses had done the rest.

The crooks who first entered the room had seen a man in evening dress spreadeagled on the floor, with his face and head covered by a curtain which had been torn from its hangings.

Before the first man had lifted the curtain and discovered the imposture which had taken place the last man had entered the room, and it was too late to stop the locking of the door.

As soon as Sexton Blake—who had reverted to his impersonation of London Moses—was able to get to a telephone booth he put through a call to his assistant in Baker Street, describing what had happened, and a daring plan which he had made.

"My luck's in, my lad," he finished, "and I'm going to play it for all I'm worth. If I've the luck to-night that I've had this evening, we shall smash up the gang. I know you'll do your part all right."

### The Double Raid

THE news which Rita brought to the pre-arranged meeting in Prothero's had a staggering effect upon Prothero and Bowery George, who, in the absence of Alfredi and London Moses, were the only remaining members of the gang.

"Sure?" laughed the girl hysterically. "Yes, I am sure, and more than sure!"

"But," Bowery George almost screamed, "if that man was Sexton Blake, he knows enough to ruin the lot of us!"

"Knew enough!" corrected the girl.

They turned with renewed hope shining out of their eyes.

"Knew enough?" they repeated. "Do you mean—"

"I mean," she told them, "that unless Sexton Blake is a wizard he is a dead man by now. Monsieur Zenith saw through his disguise in a moment, and when I left Smith's word had gone

round that Sexton Blake was a prisoner in one of the small rooms there."

"And are you sure that that was true?"

"Perfectly sure," replied Rita. "As I came away, I could hear him kicking on the door panels. He's for it all right."

She thought she was telling the truth, for she had seen the man whom Smith's took to be Monsieur Zenith after his pursuit of Sexton Blake. The hammering which she had heard was caused, not by Blake, but by the gang whom he had entrapped.

Their minds relieved from this first and greatest suspense, her two confederates first poured themselves a stiff drink apiece and then inquired for news of the missing document.

"That," said the girl, "was given to me by Zenith himself."

"And Zenith," said Prothero. "Did Alfred bump him off?"

Rita sighed callously.

"Alfred," she said, "bungled, as usual, and was punished for it. Zenith broke his wrist."

"Serves him right," commented Bowery George. "I should not have been sorry if it had been his neck!"

Prothero had been thinking things over.

"But look here," he said. "If Zenith is a free man, he will do what I have no doubt he intended to do when he gave you that paper. He will make an effort to follow you, if he hasn't already had you followed, with a view to getting hold of the completed document."

"You're telling me!" Rita scoffed. "If either of you men had ever tried to follow me you wouldn't talk that way. I am a very smooth worker when it comes to covering my tracks. Zenith had other things to think about, and nobody tailed me here."

"Then," said Prothero, "with Sexton Blake and Zenith left cold, we are—uh-h'm—on velvet. Let's get down to it. If this letter is what we think it is, we can collect the stuff, and then scatter to the ends of the earth. Personally, I favour the Argentine."

"Me for the States," affirmed Bowery George.

"London will do for me," said Rita; and it was safe to say that each of this precious trio had deliberately misled the other two.

They had already decoded the first half of Gentleman Gerald's legacy and had the code ready to decipher the remainder.

Within five minutes Prothero had written out the whole message into comprehensible English upon a half-sheet of notepaper, with the others bending over his shoulder, and reading every word that he wrote.

They saw, as he did, that with the information now at their disposal, they could put their hands on every item of the loot which Gentleman Gerald had accumulated, and which, so far, the police of two continents had been unable to find.

"By heck, we've got it!" said Bowery George in triumph.

"I think so," said Mr. Prothero. "Uh-h'm! Yes, I think so."

"Up with your hands!"

It was the voice of Sexton Blake.

No longer spectacled, no longer with his shoulders hunched around an apparently stunted neck, Sexton Blake stood in the doorway, and a heavy automatic held at the height of his elbow persuaded the three desperados to obey.

They turned slowly, with their open palms obligingly displayed on a level with their自觉.

Prothero's right hand showed a tendency to creep towards the opening of his waistcoat; but Blake warned him pleasantly that it was unwise. "If," he said, "you have a gun within the loop of your braces, Prothero, you had better leave it there. You are dangerous people, and I cannot afford to take chances. I should have to kill you."

"All right," said Bowery George. "It's a fair cop!"

Of the three, he was the only one who had some hope of escaping conviction for a crime.

They watched Blake's every movement for an evening which they might exploit to his disadvantage.

"That," said Sexton Blake, referring to the pieces of paper upon the table, "is, I presume, a complete transcription of the document which was the legacy of Gentleman Gerald to the solicitor who defended him. I will trouble you."

Blake stopped in astonishment, and then dived forward in the direction of the papers.

The light in the room in which they stood, and that in the hall outside, had suddenly been extinguished.

The ever-ready knife-blade of Bowery George stabbed into the table with a thud near Blake's right hand.

The heavy body of Prothero, who was grunting with effort, leaned over Sexton Blake on the same quest as himself. Rita's slender hand was undoubtedly not very far away.

Then, close beside them in the darkened room, there was a shrill whistle; and in obedience to some hand upon a distant switch, the lights came again into being.

Zenith the Albino stood in the doorway, and in his unwavering hand was an automatic.

Blake, in his anxiety to seize those all-important documents, had pocketed his own weapon; and now, when the albino's brief command of "Up!" came to him, he was as much at the mercy of Monsieur Zenith as the rest had been at his moment before.

Bowery George's knife still stuck, quivering, in the table, and all the three pieces of paper which comprised the document—the original in its two parts, and the translation upon a half-sheet of notepaper—were also there in plain view.

Zenith marked down the position of the translation, and again emitted the shrill whistle which had heralded his appearance. And again the distant switch was thrown over; again there was darkness.

This time Blake guessed the meaning of the signal, and hurled himself at a spot immediately

between the albino and the transcription which he knew the man must be endeavouring to secure.

A torch flashed out from the corner of the room where they had last seen the albino.

Blake, without hesitation, fired in the direction of the torch and, animated by the same impulse—to prevent, at any cost, the escape of the man who had robbed them—the other three surged forward.

The torch lay upon a chair, and the albino, who had skirted the side of the room farthest from the windows, snatched up the transcription and rushed through the open doorway.

Blake had no chance to follow him. He was alone in a small room with three persons, each of whom ardently desired his death.

He lost no time in picking up the torch and starting to back towards the doorway.

As it was, he could not keep all three of his enemies in the beam, and he was obliged to concentrate upon Prothero—the only one whom he knew to possess a gun.

Blake was now at the door, and stepped quickly into the hall, locking the door after him and pocketing the key. Running along the hall, he threw open the street door, flashed the torch thrice on to the ground, and waited.

Immediately the gate was opened by Inspector Coutts, and from the back of the house came the impatient knocking of others who sought admittance.

"Watch the street," ordered Sexton Blake.

*Continued overleaf.*

# The ROUND TABLE

Readers get together here to exchange views.

Write to:

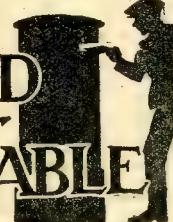
The Editor,

DETECTIVE WEEKLY,

The Fleetway House,

Farringdon Street,

London, E.C.4.



**CORRESPONDENCE** this week brings to my notice two requirements which seem to be pretty general among readers. First, "spooky" stories. Second, the return to our pages of that gay adventurer, Waldo, the Wonder Man.

Here are a few extracts from letters bearing these things out:

*Just recently, I don't think the stories have been as "spooky" as they used to be. I should like Blake to pay a visit to China, because I am particularly interested in Orientals.*—Irene Manning, Langley Green, near Birmingham.

*I have been taking D.W. for a few weeks now and like it very much. Do you think you could bring ghosts into the stories?*—Peter Barkell (aged 10), Daventry.

*My choice is to have more "spooks" in your serials. Mysterious characters in an old gabled house and plenty of thrills which make you wonder what is going to happen next. I have been a regular reader since I was 12 years of age, and I am now 40.*—P. Bishop, Bradford, Yorks.

*The Man Who Made Gold*, and shows Nazi agents at work in their own nasty way. Blake unravels a deep mystery in exposing them. You mustn't miss this exciting story, which has as its setting the wild West Coast of Scotland.

*As I have said so often before, I welcome opinions from readers, and I want you to write as often as you can. The Round Table is where we get together and every point raised is put to the general assembly.*

*Next week's story is a straight Blake adventure, and a very curious one at that. It is called*

*"The Man in Black," I should like to see more stories of this type.*—E. S. Pearman, Shepherd's Bush.

*Well, I have shown you four letters asking for "spooky" stories, and I have several more on my desk. I think that Edward Holmes will be satisfying these readers with his thrilling account of the weird happenings at the Castle of Sainte Marguerite. His story of the radio play, "A Case for Sexton Blake," is packed with drama. Edward Holmes, incidentally, was author of "The Man in Black," referred to by Reader Pearman.*

After the spooks, Waldo. We come now to the letters asking for the return of the popular Wonder Man. Here are a few of them:

*Lately, Rupert Waldo has been much neglected. Couldn't we hear a bit more of this amusing strong man? In my opinion D.W. can't be beaten.*—Cyril White, Tolpuddle, Dorset.

*I would very much like to see Waldo, Zenith, and Inspector Coutts back again. I am pleased to see Pedro, the faithful old hound, taking part in so many of Blake's recent cases.*—D. E. Stowe, Winsor Green, Birmingham.

*I am an evacuated boy. I have D.W. every week. Everybody in the house likes it. Do you think it possible to have Waldo, the Wonder Man chasing Plummer in Africa?*—P. Cambridge, Brightont.

*My favourite characters are Yvonne and Waldo. My father has taken your magazine since the last war, and when we have finished with our copies we pass them on to the soldiers.*—Miss K. Sawyer, Selby.

In answer to these readers—and many more—Waldo, the Wonder Man, is already on his way back. He will be bursting into our pages within the next few weeks. Reader Stowe will have seen by now, that Zenith and Coutts are already re-established.

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"All the doorways, front and back. Zenith has been here, and must still be about the premises."

Inspector Coutts passed along the order to a subordinate outside, and then returned to the side of the private detective.

"Don't stand too far into the hall," warned Sexton Blake. "I have got in this room the three beauties about whom I instructed Tinker to phone you, and they are quite likely to fire through the panels on the off-chance of finding me."

"That be blowed for a tale," was the inspector's rejoinder.

What he lacked in imagination, the burly inspector certainly made up in courage and resolution for, without hesitation he kicked upon the bottom panel of the door and addressed the three within the room as one conscious of having the authority of the law behind him.

"Now then, Prothero," he shouted, "and you other two, I'm coming in to talk to you. If you want to shoot, shoot. But I have got thirty men here, and if you do for me, you'll swing."

There was no response from within the room.

"Before you go in," said Blake, "I think we will switch on the electric light."

Having in mind the fact that Zenith the Albino might be hiding somewhere about the house, he took his automatic from his pocket and then, more by instinct than by knowledge, found his way to the main switch, which had been actuated to such theatrical effect by Zenith's unknown accomplice. He pulled the switch over and returned to the hall.

But the inspector had been too impatient to wait for him. In his impetuous way he had decided to put his shoulder to the door. There was a splintering crash, and as the lights went on the inspector lurched into the room. He was just in time to see the three crooks scrambling through the window. Prothero turned as he heard the crash and fired point-blank at Coutts. But the bullets went wide.

The next instant he had raced to the window and in a few seconds the three were in the garden—to find themselves surrounded by the inspector's men!

"Very neat," said the inspector as Blake joined him and the prisoners were led towards a waiting car. "Now for Zenith. He can't possibly have made his escape. I have had the place surrounded for half an hour or more. We will search this house from the coal cellar to the chimney-pots, and if he escapes me this time I'll—I'll send in my resignation!"

"About six doors down," said Sexton Blake reflectively, "there's an empty house. Have you set a watch upon that?"

Coutts looked at Sexton Blake as if he imagined that the private detective had taken leave of his senses.

"Of course I haven't. Why should I keep watch on that?"

"Because," Blake told him, "there is a first-floor balcony which runs the full length of this terrace. I entered this house by picking the lock of the empty house and climbing along the balcony. If the same idea has occurred to our friend the albino—which it probably has—"

"You mean he will escape?"

Sexton Blake passed out at the front gate and turned in the direction indicated.

"Like a fool," he said, "I told Tinker to watch that house. I didn't tell him to warn you to do the same thing, Coutts. I have made a mistake—a bad mistake. If any harm should come to that lad—"

With the inspector by his side, he hurried along to the empty house.

The front door was wide open, and in the garden lay a slim figure, which it was easy to recognise.

"Tinker!" cried Sexton Blake.

In the light of the police-inspector's torch they saw the lad move his head, struggle into a sitting position, and rise unsteadily to his feet. "Have you got Zenith, guv'nor?"

"No," said Sexton Blake. "And then:

"Are you hurt, my lad?"

"Hurt?"

Tinker shook himself.

"No, I don't think so, guv'nor. I had a chance to stop Zenith, but he was too quick for me. As a matter of fact, he—"

The youngster laughed ruefully.

"He managed to bag my gun. They locked me—Zenith and that Japanese chap—they

locked me in that front room on the first floor. I tried to jump from the balcony, and I—blow it!—I believe I knocked myself out with my own knee."

Sexton Blake wrung his young assistant's hand.

"You did your best," he said, "and anyway, we've got three very important prisoners."

"And did you manage," asked Coutts, "to get that paper, Blake?"

"Part of it," said the detective. "Part only; and that, I'm afraid, isn't going to be much use."

"Bad luck!" commented the inspector. "And what became of the rest of it?"

"The rest of it," said Sexton Blake, "went to Zenith. He holds the clue to Gentleman Gerald's loot, and we hold only part of it. It's a race between us, and all the advantages are with him."

### Solving the Code

TO Edgar T. Purvis, Esq.

Sir,—If you are clever enough to decode this letter, which I have no doubt you are, you will find what may prove of some recompense for your work on my behalf, for which you would, I fear, remain unpaid.

I am writing this will and testament in a code which I happen to remember, for the reason that, so written, it will be unintelligible to the vulgar.

I shall hand it to you at our last interview.

The small collection of other people's property which I have been enabled to make, and which I will give and bequeath to you, is deposited within three . . . . . gate Street, E.

The numbers of the . . . . . 167 to 169.

Such was Sexton Blake's translation of the coded bequest which Gentleman Gerald had made to his solicitor. The blanks were unfortunate inasmuch as they represented the key to the entire letter, but they were, or seemed to be, ancient mutilations.

So far, the great detective had only achieved what Prothero and his friends had already achieved before him, in decoding Gentleman Gerald's letter; but, from that point, knowing that time was the essence of the enterprise, Sexton Blake had concentrated upon his meaning of the unfinished message with a process of intensified reasoning, assisted by coffee, strong tobacco, and deep thought.

And he had succeeded.

From the elementary but laborious task of picking out from the directory every street in the East of London with a name ending with "gate," he passed to the elimination of those

which could not possibly contain a house numbered 167.

After that, he had got the telephone to work, and, with the willing help of the police, had inquired into the respectability of all houses upon his list which bore any of the three numbers 167, 168, or 169.

He had ascertained by this means that Gentleman Gerald's loot was not stored in a house or houses, and, with complete patience, had begun the whole tedious operation over again.

If the stolen goods were not deposited in houses, he asked himself, in what form of building not being a house, but yet having a number, was it possible that they were placed? Exterminating the length of the missing words by the context in the mutilated letter, he arrived at the formula "x x x x x x are," and, after a further inquiry reminiscent of crossword puzzles, established the missing word as "Arches."

The rest was easy, for it was then merely a matter of consulting a large-scale map of London and discovering the point at which a railway crossed over a street in the Eastern postal district the name of which ended in "gate." The name was found to be Floodgate Street.

It was early the following morning when Sexton Blake rang through to Scotland Yard and informed Inspector Coutts that he had every reason to believe that he was in a position to complete the message.

Inspector Coutts was both triumphant and excited. The wire seemed to reverberate with the intensity of his voice.

Gentleman Gerald, in his nefarious operations, had deprived many famous people of art treasures which could not be replaced, and those famous people had long been offering all sorts of rewards and other inducements to any person who could restore what they had lost.

"I have a car round to your place within fifteen minutes," promised the inspector. "This will be a great day, Blake, for us at Scotland Yard."

"Assuming," Blake reminded him, "that Monsieur Zenith has not robbed the hen-roost before we arrive. Monsieur Zenith, you will remember, did not have to do any decoding. He knew at nine o'clock last night exactly where the treasure lay, and, from what I know of him, he is not likely to have wasted any time."

"I agree with you, Blake; but remember that this is not stuff which a man can carry away in his pockets."

"We have certain knowledge that a couple of pantechnicons would be needed to remove it. You don't mean to tell me that Zenith would be able to do a thing like that overnight without being stopped and questioned by the police."

And for once Coutts was right.

It was before seven o'clock when the police car containing Blake, Coutts, and Tinker arrived at Floodgate Street. And it was followed by others containing picked men of the Flying Squad.

Floodgate Street was a small turning off Commercial Road, and it was easy to find the three arches. A constable told them they had been locked up for at least a year. Blake stepped to one of the big wooden gates, and after a few moments' juggling with one of his house-breaking implements the door stood open.

They passed inside and at once found the place was stacked with large packing-cases. On opening one or two of these it was to know for certain that here was Gentleman Gerald's loot. The rest of it was beneath the other two arches.

Coutts rubbed his hands with glee.

"We've got the stuff, Blake," he said triumphantly. "It's a great haul."

But Blake was not so complacent.

"And we have lost Zenith—though we have beaten him to the loot."

Though he did not know it, even as they stood there a man stood at the dusty window of an empty house near by. His eyes, red-irised and fringed with white lashes, glanced across towards the arches.

"I could not have managed to get the stuff away in time," he told himself. "Blake was too quick for me. But I am still free."

The strange crook suddenly laughed—at his own failure, and at his own futility. Then, leaving the empty room, he gained a side turning and disappeared into the maze of mean streets that opened out before him.

THE END.

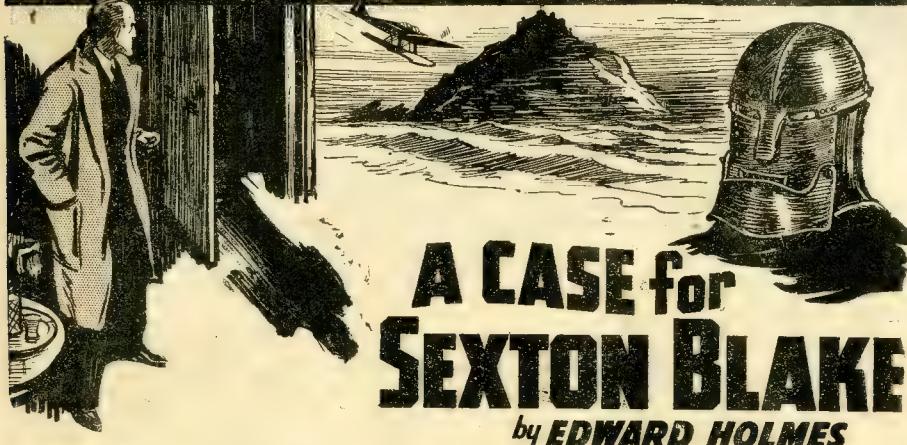


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# The Story of the RADIO PLAY



## A CASE for SEXTON BLAKE

by EDWARD HOLMES

### The Story So Far

THE castle of Sainte Marguerite stood, grim and lonely, on a lake-bound rock in Northumberland. It was the ancient home of the Marthioly family, descendants of a French nobleman who had been imprisoned in the Bastille more than two hundred years ago.

COUNT Marthioly's only crime was that he looked exactly like Louis XIV of France. For that unfortunate resemblance he was condemned by a jealous monarch to wear an iron mask for twenty-four weary years. The family fled to England and when Aldo died, the mask was secured by his eldest son and taken to the castle in Northumberland.

The years passed. One Marthioly succeeded another, and a legend grew up that the spirit of the long dead count still survived. It was whispered that he haunted the castle of Sainte Marguerite and that to look upon his masked ghost meant death.

One evening, Sexton Blake received a telegram from his friend, Tony Carradine, whose mother was a Marthioly, that the Man in the Iron Mask had walked again. Overwhelmed by some nameless dread, Carradine implored the Baker Street detective to go to Sainte Marguerite to investigate.

Blake and Tinker flew to Northumberland next morning to find a tragic tale. Aldo Marthioly, Tony's uncle, had been murdered overnight and the Man in the Iron Mask had been seen outside his room.

The household was made up of Peter Marthioly, that being Angelo's elder brother; Benito (Angelo's son); Tony Carradine, and his fiancee, Joan Dixon; Angus, the butler, and a few servants, including Siboku, who had returned from Borneo with the dead man. Blake, with no belief in ghosts, knew that one of these must be the murderer. In the presence of Inspector McTaggart of the Northumberland police, Benito accused his master. Tony was discovered the crime.

Following their own line of investigation, Blake and Tinker contacted the masked murderer in a secret passage, but were struck down and narrowly escaped death in a subterranean torrent. Later, from the lake-shore, they saw the Man in the Iron Mask on the battlements, and reaching the roof in a blinding storm, discovered Peter Marthioly just ahead of them. Marthioly, apparently in pursuit of the murderer, vanished into a watch tower, there was the sound of shots, and then the unholy laughter of the masked assassin. Blake and Tinker burst the locked door to the watch tower. There was no sign either of the Man or of Peter Marthioly.

An examination showed a wide chimney as the probable means of escape. Blake and Tinker went down it, but had not travelled far when there was an explosion above them. Then, below, they heard the chilling, echoing chuckle of the murderer as an avalanche of masonry hurtled down on them.

(Now read on)

### Where is Siboku?

OAN DIXON watched Sexton Blake and Tinker race for the tower staircase, which led up to the roof of the castle, and something very like panic clutched at her heart.

She had told Blake of Siboku's terror, and how he had run away from them. "All the more reason we should hurry to the roof!" Blake had snapped. And he and Tinker had plunged headlong up the twisty stairs.

What was happening now?

Joan pushed the great door to and shut out the wildness of the stormy afternoon. Her breath was coming quickly, and as she stood there, with her back against the thick oak door, and faced the huge emptiness of the wide hall, she felt very small and lonely.

Before she could stop it—almost without her knowing it—she called for the first person who came to her mind.

"Tony! Tony!"

It was Inspector McTaggart who heard her

call, and who came hurrying out on to the balcony.

"Miss Dixon—what is it?" McTaggart came down the stone stairs. "What's the matter, lass?"

Joan went forward to meet him.

"Something dreadful's happening! I know it! Where's Tony—where is he?"

"Hey—hey—hold hard a minute! Let's have one thing at a time, please!" McTaggart's tone was at once concerned and fatherly. "What's happening that's so dreadful? Tell me!"

But before Joan could reply, Tony Carradine came running into view upon the gallery above them.

"Joan darling! What's the matter? I heard you call!"

Joan spun away from McTaggart and hurried up the steps to meet Tony half-way.

"Tony—then you're all right? Nothing's happened to you?"

Carradine took her in his arms.

"Of course I'm all right, darling. What's the matter?"

"Yes," McTaggart put in, in a tone of patient exasperation, "would ye be so good as tae tell me why ye think anything has happened?"

"I've just let Mr. Blake and Tinker in," explained Joan, "and they went rushing up to the roof. When I told them that Siboku had run away, it made them hurry all the more!"

"They must have seen something happening up there while they were outside!" exclaimed Carradine.

"I—I was afraid it might be happening to you, Tony. That's why I called out!" went on Joan.

McTaggart seemed to shake himself into action.

"Something happening on the roof!" he growled. "Losh, it'll be that skulking Indian! He dodged us all when he ran away, and we lost him somewhere upstairs. Come on; I'm going to find out what's up. If the Man in the Iron Mask is trying' any more o' his tricks, this is going tae be once too often!"

Crashing thunder followed upon McTaggart's words. The inspector had just reached the door at the foot of the tower staircase when a sharper detonation from somewhere above mingled with the muttering rumble of the thunder.

"What's that?" demanded the inspector.

"It sounded like an explosion!" put in Tony tensely. "It—it almost seemed to come from the chimney!"

McTaggart stood hesitating. Then a growing rumble from the direction of the vast, open fireplace joined the sounds of the raging storm. A shower of soot pattered down on to the glowing embers of the fire.

"Something's coming down the chimney!" cried Tony.

McTaggart was back at his side in three swift steps. Like the growing mutter of an approaching avalanche, the noise from the fireplace grew.

A moment later, amid a great cloud of dislodged soot, something bulky shot down into the hearth. Hot embers scattered and flew out over

HEAR IT EVERY  
TUESDAY ON  
THE AIR: READ IT  
EVERY THURS-  
DAY IN "D.W."

the stone flags of the hall. Then the grimy figure of a man resolved itself, staggering from the eddying soot and smoke.

"Uncle Peter!" gasped Carradine. "Mr. Marthioly!" cried McTaggart. "What the—"

The soot-grimed figure took a tottering pace towards them.

"The Man in the Iron Mask—attacked me on the roof!" he gasped.

But before the half-dazed little group really had time to absorb this statement the noise from the chimney grew again in volume, and soot poured out into the room, almost smothering the fire.

"Something else is coming down!" cried Tony.

There was a flurry of legs and arms in the clouds of flying soot, and then the figures of Sexton Blake and Tinker, each clutching at the other, staggered out into the room.

"Away from the fireplace!" commanded Blake hoarsely.

A second later an avalanche of dislodged masonry, bringing in its wake lighter clouds of smashed mortar and stone, cataracted into the room.

"Jumping cats—that was close!" gasped Tinker.

"Another second, and we should have perished under about half a ton of masonry!" remarked Blake grimly. Then: "Are you all right, Mr. Marthioly?"

Peter Marthioly's voice was a little shaky as he replied:

"Yes, I'm all right, now—and I fancy that I owe my life to you! Only the fact that you were so hard upon his heels stopped the Man in the Iron Mask from killing me. I have to thank you, Mr. Blake!"

"Would somebody mind tellin' me just what's been going on here?" demanded McTaggart plaintively. "I'm only the inspector of police in charge of the case, I know, but you might tell me something!"

"Yes," put in Blake, "may we hear your story, Mr. Peter?"

"I was searching the upper floors for Siboku, like all the rest of you, when the notion came to me that he might have gone up to the roof. So I hurried on up there. When I reached the roof the first thing I saw was the figure of the Man in the Iron Mask—up on the tail of old watch-tower. I saw him as plainly as I see you, Blake. He was dressed in a long, black cloak, and on his head was the Iron Mask, exactly as it has always been described to me. I saw him clearly in the lightning."

"Tony, my boy"—Peter Marthioly turned towards Tony Carradine—"I owe you an apology for ever doubting that you saw this strange apparition. However, I can't believe that it was really a ghost, and I did not then. My only thought was to tackle the masquerader, and as I had my gun, I made straight for the door of the watch-tower. I intended to take the killer by surprise—rather foolishly, as it now proves, for he turned the tables and took me by surprise. I crept into the tower, gun in hand. No sooner was I inside than the door slammed behind me, and I heard his laughter in the darkness. I fired at where I judged he must be—but he only laughed again; and then something hit me on the head. The next thing I remember was being alone in pitchy darkness. I know now that I was in the chimney. I suppose my attacker must have carried me there."

"Did ye see who it was?" asked McTaggart shrewdly.

Peter Marthioly shook his head.

"That's an awfu' pity!" sighed the inspector. "But go on, sir—what happened then?"

"Well, at that moment I had not the slightest

idea where I was. All I knew was that I was sitting hunched up in utter blackness. Then I heard Blake's voice from somewhere above me. He was whispering something about the chimney curving to the left. Even then I don't think I fully realised where I was. But when Blake struck a match and I could see its gleam, about thirty or forty feet above me, I realised that my attacker had left me sitting on a sort of shelf, built into the brickwork of the chimney itself. I suppose that it was some sort of foot-hold for the old-time sweeps. I was just going to call out to Blake when something else occurred—"

"I know—'the explosion!'" put in Tinker.

"Yes. I heard Blake cry out something about dynamite, and you, Tinker, shouted something like 'We're trapped—the masonry's coming down on top of us!' And then—that awful laugh!"

"We heard it," said Blake soberly. "It came from below us."

"It was just above my head—terribly close," said Peter, "and I think it was that which galvanised me into the realisation of the deadly peril I was in. I heard you yell at Tinker, 'Drop—it's our only chance!' and I suppose I obeyed you myself—just as if you'd shouted at me, instead of Tinker. Anyway, I dropped down the chimney and came out in the fireplace here just before you two."

"Ye've all had a verr-a narrow shave!"

Sexton Blake was about to speak, when the figure of Benito came into view on the gallery above.

"Good heavens!" he cried. "What's been happening?"

He came to a halt at the head of the stairs, apparently dumbfounded at the sight of the chaos of masonry and soot below him. It was Blake who replied.

"You'll be interested to hear that the Man in the Iron Mask has struck again. This time he has attempted the life of Mr. Peter here."

"Attacked Uncle Peter?"

"Yes—perhaps you'd tell us where you've been all this time," suggested Blake.

"I've been searching high and low for Siboku," said Benito, coming downstairs as he spoke. Then he halted as the full implication of Blake's question struck home.

"What are you all looking at me like that for?"

"Another crime has been attempted," said Sexton Blake sternly. "We must know where everybody was at the time. Only in that way can we establish who was innocent, as well as who was guilty." He paused for a moment. "Was anybody with you?"

"No!" Benito flung the word defiantly down at Blake. "Why don't you ask my cousin where he was. That might be more to the point!"

"I was coming to that," said Blake evenly. "Where were you, Tony?"

"I can answer that," put in McTaggart. "Mr. Carradine was here with me. So was Miss Dixon, for that matter."

"And Angus?" demanded Blake sharply.

"Where's Angus?"

"I'll ring for him—!" began Peter. Then the voice of the old servant cut in.

"I'm here!" His voice echoed queerly down from the great stone gallery. The old man was standing, resting on his hands against the carved stone balustrade. "If it's an alibi you're wanting, Mr. Sexton Blake—then I'll be disappointing you. I've not got one. I was looking for that yellow devil, Siboku, and I was alone. Just like Mr. Benito—I was alone." The old man chuckled a little oddly.

"That'll do, Angus. Come down here!" Peter Marthioly said sharply. "The Man in the Iron Mask has just tried to kill me!"

A curious change came over the old man at these words. He hurried down the stairs to his master.

"The Man in the Iron Mask attacked you?" the words were fearful, incredulous. "Then—the curse falls upon the head of the house—the curse of the iron mask!"

"What are you talking about?" demanded Blake sharply.

"To look upon the mask is death!" intoned Angus, in a ringing voice. "And now the curse falls upon the head of the house!" Then suddenly his manner changed, and he seemed almost to shrink, to become once more the rather cringing ancient servant. "I—I'll get a bath ready for you, Mr. Peter. You'll want to get some of that filth off—"

And muttering about baths for Blake and Tinker as well, the old retainer shuffled away. McTaggart took a step forward.

"No—let him go," said Blake quietly. "Now we must find Siboku. There's no time to be lost. Tell me—just what happened when he ran away from you?"

"You'd gone out with Tinker tae see yer aeroplane, ye'll remember," began McTaggart. "You left us all here, by the fireplace. Well—twas after about five minutes—there came the most almighty crash o' thunder ye've ever heard. And then Siboku just seemed tae go crazy."

"Yes," Tony Carradine broke in, "he leaped to his feet, and when I tried to grab him, he gave me a shove that sent me staggering backwards into the inspector here, and I'm afraid we both went down in a heap."

"And what about you?" Blake turned to Peter Marthioly.

"What did you do?"

"I'm afraid I was too dumbfounded to do anything. I just gaped!"

"Me, too!" put in Joan. "I think old Angus was the first to do anything. He went shuffling after Siboku as fast as his old legs would carry him. Then Tony and the inspector picked themselves up, and took up the chase."

"Which way did Siboku go?" demanded Blake.

"Over there, through that curtained archway!" McTaggart pointed across the hall. Blake strode across, and the others followed. He thrust the heavy curtains aside, and strode through the archway. They found themselves in a sort of passage, from which a flight of stone steps descended at the farther end, and a spiral of curiously carved wooden stairs led upwards.

"I see," mused Blake. "Which way did Siboku go?"

"Upstairs," stated McTaggart confidently. "We heard that door across the stairs slam."

Blake stepped up the first three stairs, and stopped before the glass-topped door that barred the way up the spiral.

"H'm—this door looks newer than the staircase!"

"It is," put in Peter Marthioly. "I had it put there about twelve months ago. The draught that used to sweep down those spiral stairs was frightful. They lead to the upper corridors."

"I see." Sexton Blake pulled the door open. "It opens outwards, towards anybody going up the stairs. That's interesting. You say you heard this door slam?"

"And so you assumed that Siboku had gone up this way—that's reasonable. It'll do as a working hypothesis, anyway. Now let's see what he would have done next."

Blake began to pace up the treads of the wooden spiral. After the fifth tread the boards began to creak noisily.

"Gosh," exclaimed Tinker, "these stairs are a perfect burglar-alarm! Nobody could go up or down without that racket being heard."

Blake stopped suddenly.

"Ah, yes! Did anyone hear these stairs creak as Siboku fled up them?"

"I don't remember," said Peter vaguely.

"I don't think I did," said Tony.

"I'm darn certain I didn't hear 'em!" said McTaggart.

"Then Siboku didn't come upstairs!" said Blake simply. "As Tinker said, nobody could use these stairs without the creaks being heard!"

"But the slamming door!" argued McTaggart.

"I think that I can explain that. Siboku meant to come up these stairs, and he cannoned

into that door, expecting it to open. It opens towards you, remember. So that when it didn't open, he was disconcerted, and probably staggered back." Blake hurried back down the creaking stairs to the corridor at their foot. "There's only one other way he could have gone down those stone stairs to the cellars."

"You're right!" agreed McTaggart. "What we heard was Siboku bumping into that door, and we were all so certain that he'd gone upstairs that we didn't think to look downstairs!"

"That's it!" exclaimed Blake, leading the way downstairs. From his pocket he produced an electric torch, and shone the beam before him. "Siboku" he called, and his voice echoed back at him from the vaults below. "Siboku, where are you? The thunder's going; you need have no fear. Come up from down there!"

There came a rustling from somewhere below them. Sexton Blake swung the beam of his torch around, and picked out the crouched figure of the Datu huddled at the foot of the stairs.

#### Four Suspects

**S**LOWLY the native rose to his feet, his eyes gleaming brightly up at the little group on the stairs.

His ragged bundle still clutched in his left hand, Siboku began slowly to ascend the stairs towards them.

"Where have you been all this time?" asked Blake.

"Siboku stay here—Siboku not move. Thunder devils bad magic. Siboku stay here."

McTaggart sighed heavily.

"Another person without an alibi. The place is full of 'em. Here's Angus, Benito, and now this creature, with no one tae say where they were when Mr. Peter was attacked. But I'll no' let ye go running wild about the house any more!" This last to Siboku. "I'll put one o' my men on watchin' you every moment o' the day!"

Blake chuckled.

"Good idea, Mac. And now, if you don't mind, Tinker and I will trot off and find that hot bath Angus was talking about. The sooner I get rid o' all this muck, the happier I'll be, and I don't doubt that Mr. Marthioly here feels the same way."

"Verra well. I'll be waitin' for ye, though. I'm anxious tae get on wi' the job o' investigatin' those secret passages."

When Blake and Tinker came out of the tower bed-room, which had been set aside for their use, they found McTaggart patiently sitting on the top step of the stone stairs, with his chin cupped in his hand, obviously thinking deeply.

"I've been spenidin' me time runnin' over the odds and ends o' this infernal case," he said. "If ye're ready, I suggest we go along tae the bed-room where Mr. Angelo Marthioly was murdered last night, and start work from there."

"Good idea!" agreed Blake. "I take it that you've already issued instructions to your constables as to the safeguarding of the household during your absence?"

"I have that," avérred McTaggart, as they tramped along the corridors towards their objective. "Well, that attack on Mr. Peter Marthioly has done one thing for us. It's narrowed down our circle o' suspects. It seems tae me that the person who attacked Peter Marthioly on the roof must have been either Benito, Angus, or yon heathen devil, Siboku. Yes, I'm thinkin' we'll find our Man in the Iron Mask is one o' those three."

"By the way," put in Tinker, "we did see all of those three people soon after this last attack, and none of them was smothered in soot as we were. How do you account for that?"

"That's fairly simple," Blake explained. "After all, the iron mask itself, and that long black cloak might easily be arranged to keep the wearer clean. No, Tinker, that's not worrying me. But something else is."

"And what might that be?" asked McTaggart suspiciously.

"Why do you exclude Peter Marthioly from your list of suspects?" inquired Blake coolly. McTaggart snorted, then looked at Blake to see whether the great investigator was joking.

"Weel," said the inspector, heavily ironical, "he has just been attacked by the Man in the Iron Mask, ye know. In fact, I believe ye saw it happen yourself."

"Yes—and no, Mac."

"What are ye gettin' at, man?" demanded McTaggart plaintively.

"Well, you know, Mac, everybody should be

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suspect in a case like this, and Peter Marthioly's exclusion from the list depends on his own word alone. Tinker and I, although we were close by when this attack was happening, did not actually see it take place."

"Just explain that a little more, will 'ye?"

"I think I can see what the guv'nor is getting at," put in Tinker shrewdly. "He means that the attack could have been faked by Peter Marthioly."

"Exactly, Tinker. Now, just consider what happened. Tinker and I were down outside on the lake-shore, tying up our plane. We saw the Man in the Iron Mask on the watch-tower, and made for the roof. When we got there, we saw Peter Marthioly entering the foot of the tower. The door was slammed shut behind him, before we could catch up. From within the tower we heard sounds of shots and a struggle, but nothing, mark you, that one man alone could not have produced. We broke the door down. On the roof, for a brief instant before he shut the trapdoor in our faces, we saw the Man in the Iron Mask—again alone. Finally, Peter Marthioly escaped the death his alleged murderer had planned for him."

"Hm!" breathed McTaggart. "That's right enough!"

"I reckon you've got something there, guv'nor," said Tinker enthusiastically, but Blake merely shook his head. Having put forward a theory himself, he now proceeded to tear it to shreds.

"No, Tinker, I'm afraid not. I merely pointed this out because I do not consider we should rule out Peter as a suspect. Our task is to find the motive for these crimes. Why was Angelo murdered? Why was this business on the roof staged this afternoon? When we know that, we'll know which of our four suspects is the Man in the Iron Mask!"

McTaggart had opened the door of the dead man's bed-room as Blake finished speaking, and the three of them passed inside.

"Well, here we are," he said. "And now I'll be obliged if ye'll tell me who you think is the Man in the Iron Mask. You must have formed some opinion."

"My private opinion I prefer to keep to myself," Blake replied quietly. "I will add just this. I honestly believe that the motive for the crime would be explained if we could find the missing contents of Angelo Marthioly's document box."

"What do you mean, guv'nor?"

"If I were the murderer, Tinker, and I had killed a man so as to gain possession of what

peal after peal of laughter came up to them through the open trap—the laughter of the Man in the Iron Mask. Out came Blake's gun, and he let fly shot after shot into the blackness. The mad laughter ceased. "Have you got him?" whispered Tinker.

that box contained, I should destroy the documents."

"Yon's a cheering thought!" gloomed McTaggart. "We don't know what the motive was, and now ye're as good as saying we'll never find out!"

"I wouldn't exactly say that!" replied Blake swiftly. "Remember, there's certain other evidence in the case. For example, if we were to discover the whereabouts of the iron mask itself—"

"Ay!" McTaggart thumped his left palm with his right fist. "If we could find the iron mask! And we'll only do that if we look for it. Enough o' talkin', Mr. Blake. Let's see where this secret passage begins. We'll start our search there!"

"It's just outside the bed-room door here," said Blake, "and though Tony Carradine is no longer on our list of suspects, I'd like to point out to you that this bears out his story regarding the first crime. You remember, he saw the Man in the Iron Mask standing here, just outside the door. Then, Tony tells us, he vanished. Since we don't believe in ghosts, in-spector, this secret entrance in the wall here gives us a satisfactory explanation of how our murderer did his disappearing trick."

"Yon wall looks solid enough," murmured McTaggart, inspecting the ancient stonework with interest. "They don't build houses o' half-ton slabs o' granite these days!"

"True!" smiled Blake. "Tinker, do you think you can discover the stone rosette that makes the door open. Remember, you pull it out, not push it."

"I'll find it, guv'nor!" said Tinker readily. "It ought to be about here." He reached for the row of carved stone rosettes that ran the length of the corridor at a height of about four feet from the ground. "Here it is!" he ended triumphantly, and McTaggart's eyes widened as he watched the massive block of stone swing back, to reveal a grim, dark opening beyond.

"So that's how the ghost managed tae vanish!" The inspector shone his torch into the opening. "Come on, let's take a look around in here."

They stepped inside, and in the light of their torch-beams, found themselves in an ancient corridor, walled by the rough-hewn back faces of

the granite blocks. Blake, for some reason or other, seemed very interested in the floor.

"What are you looking for down there?" asked Tinker.

Blake stopped, with the beam of his torch resting on one particular slab. Then, cautiously, he put first one foot, and then his whole weight upon it.

Behind them, the entrance slab swung back into place.

"As I thought!" murmured Blake. "A man's weight passing over this floor-slab will cause the entrance to shut behind him, as it has done now. That's what happened before, Tinker, you remember?"

"I'm not likely to forget!" said Tinker fervently.

"I suppose we can get out again?" inquired McTaggart, a little anxiously.

"Oh, yes!" Blake assured him. Then, torch in hand, he led the way along the stone passage.

In a little while it took a bend to the left. It went on in its new direction, canting slightly downwards for some time. Then they came to a flight of age-old, slime-encrusted stone stairs.

Sexton Blake led the way down.

### The Man Who Watched

"So that's the famous treadmill!" McTaggart observed.

A quarter of an hour had passed, and the three investigators had now reached the gloomy vault where Blake and Tinker had so nearly met their deaths earlier that day.

The great treadmill creaked and groaned as it turned ponderously. The rushing of underground water filled their ears.

"Yes!" said Blake grimly. "A pretty relic. I wonder how many poor wretches have screamed their lives out in this awful vault. This place, as we were assured by the Man in the Iron Mask, was the torture chamber in the castle's busiest days. I see that one or two other relics of ancient cruelty exist down here. Unless I'm greatly mistaken, that's a rack over there, and that big, basket-shaped iron brazier has been used for other purposes than warming this place, I'll warrant."

"Ay, it's no' a pretty place, this!" McTaggart gave a shudder. "Well, Mr. Blake, we've no' found the iron mask yet, neither have we found how the murderer got out of that chimney this afternoon. There must be a way through there, you know; we'd better be getting along!"

At that moment Tinker, who had gone off prospecting in dark corners by himself, gave an excited shout.

"Hey, guv'nor—come over here!"

McTaggart and Blake hurried across to the gloomy corner where Tinker had been searching. The lad had found a big iron ring, set in a slab of stone, and he was tugging it upwards. And, strangely, for it appeared to be a massive slab of stone, weighing anything up to half a ton, the stone was rising to Tinker's tug.

"This slab—it's hinged—I can lift it, see?" said Tinker excitedly. "And from the easy way it's rising there seems to be some sort of counter-weight attached to it. There, it's upright!"

Sexton Blake shone his torch down into the blackness below.

"More steps!" he exclaimed. "Leading down farther still!"

"Gosh, we must be below the water-level of the lake already!" observed Tinker.

"Let's see where they lead us!" said Blake sharply. "Follow me!"

Leaving the slab standing open behind them, Sexton Blake, Tinker, and the inspector stepped cautiously down the green, slimy stone stairs.

"They're slippery!" remarked Tinker.

"Yes, they seem to have been hewn from the solid rock on which the castle stands," returned Blake. "I wonder how much farther they go down?"

"I'll lay we're half-way tae Hades already!" growled McTaggart. "But carry on—we'll see where they go, even if I get nightmares about this place for the rest o' my life!"

It was a good thing that McTaggart did not look back over his shoulder as he spoke.

Framed in the opening of the trapdoor thirty feet above and behind them was a head—the head of the Man in the Iron Mask!

Balefully, through the slanting slits in the black metal, the glinting eyes of the murderer watched them.

The three vanished from his sight around a bend. Softly and silently he, too, lowered himself into the cavity, and began descending the stairs.

"So!" he whispered softly, and the hiss of his voice sounded oddly from under the mask of iron. "So—they have found the tunnel under the lake! Let us see where it leads them!"

And with infinite stealth the Man in the Iron Mask began to track the trackers.

"Well, I must say it's nice tae see sunlight again!" observed McTaggart, in tones of relief. "Of all the damned unhealthy places I've ever been in, that tunnel just about takes the biscuit!"

"We seem to have come right under the lake, and out upon the shore," observed Blake, who still headed the procession of three. "And unless I'm mistaken, we're now in that ancient wind-mill that can be seen from the castle."

Tinker and McTaggart joined Blake as he spoke. Then the Baker Street investigator lowered the oak trapdoor which they had just passed through, and examined it with interest.

"You see, that trapdoor is not a regular rectangle in shape. It's just formed of the natural planking of the floor. Its edges fall along the natural breaks and joints in the plank. Rather cunning, that. However, let's take a further look round. There's a rather rickety-looking ladder over yonder. Let's see where it leads."

Sexton Blake led the way across to the ladder, and began to climb up it into the sunlight which streamed down at them from the square opening above their heads. McTaggart and Tinker followed.

They found themselves in what was obviously the lower part of an ancient, half-ruined wind-mill.

"Ay, this is Cawtry's mill we're in," said McTaggart. "Many's the time I've played around this very place when I was a wee laddie. But I never dreamt there was a tunnel leadin' from here under the lake to Sainte Marguerite. What have ye got there, Mr. Blake?"

"Nothing very much, inspector, but just come and take a look at this straw over here in the corner."

Sexton Blake prodded the pile of loose straw with his foot as McTaggart and Tinker joined him.

"Someone's been sleeping there," said Tinker

quickly. "You can see the impress of his body quite clearly!"

"Probably some tramp," suggested McTaggart. "Not that we get a lot o' tramps about here. It's too lonely by a long sight."

"It might have been Siboku, you know!" suggested Tinker eagerly. "He admits he's been in the neighbourhood for the last few days, and now that we've found that tunnel leading under the lake to the castle—"

"You're right!" cried McTaggart. "Now if we could only prove that you yellow heathen was here—"

"We'll search this place from cellar to roof!" said Sexton Blake.

### "You Shall Burn, Blake!"

HALF an hour later the three of them, searching in concert, as thoroughly as only three men who have had long experience and much practice can search, had reached the high loft of the ancient mill.

Here were the big wooden cogs which geared the horizontal axle of the great sails to the vertical axle which carried the grindstone.

Between the broken chinks of rotting wood-work, the moorland winds whistled and howled.

"You'd never think a windmill was such a big affair, would you?" said Tinker. "We must be all of fifty feet from the ground!"

"Quite that!" agreed Blake, his attention more than half on the job of searching the place. "And nearly half of it is made up by the great grinding-room below our feet. Floor to ceiling, that room is a clear twenty feet!"

"I noticed it coming up the ladder!" growled McTaggart. "I never did have a head for heights. I don't know how I'm going tae get down!"

Blake and Tinker grinned surreptitiously at the inspector's gloom.

"We'll tear our shirts into strips, and make a rope to lower you!" promised Tinker solemnly.

"Och! Awa' wi' ye!" growled McTaggart, conscious that he was having his leg pulled.

The search went on.

Suddenly Blake gave a sharp cry. He had been probing about in the ancient thatching of the roof, and now he was tugging something from it.

"What is it, guv'nor?" Blake held out a long object, rather like a small Indian club, with an extra handle beyond the bulge.

"What is it—a club o' some sorts?" asked McTaggart.

"No; it's the pipes that Tinker and I heard playing when we got here. They're Datu pipes, Mac, and I'll stake a hundred to one that they're Siboku's property. They rather clinch our suspicions that he has been camping here in the mill, though they do not prove the fact by any means."

"Pipes?" said McTaggart dubiously, eyeing the odd-shaped object in Blake's hands. "Ye mean tae say that he can get music out o' that thing?"

"We can certainly get what is accepted as music in such wild countries as Borneo," said Blake slyly. "Personally, I consider that these pipes are rather reminiscent of the bagpipes. Listen!"

McTaggart snorted as, smiling slightly, Sexton Blake raised the queer instrument to his lips. His fingers played over the row of air-holes, and an odd, exotic melody issued from the pipes. The inspector's jaw dropped, and Tinker's eyes widened as Blake played. Then:

"That's it!" cried Tinker. "That's the tune we heard! The Datu death song!"

The tune grew quicker, became a wild whirl of outlandish melody.

And at that moment came a resounding crash from below.

Blake's music came to an abrupt halt. An instant of silence followed.

"Losh!" gasped McTaggart. "The ladder's fallen away! Thank heaven it didnae go while we were on it!"

"Confound!" snapped Blake, his usual calm ruffled by this sudden and unexpected accident. "That means we're practically stranded up here! What on earth could have—"

Cutting short his words came peal after peal of mad, echoing laughter.

The laughter of the Man in the Iron Mask!

"The fiend—he's trapped us again!" cried

Blake. He was tugging his gun from his pocket as he spoke.

"Where is he, guv'nor?"

"Skulkin' well out o' sight!" snarled McTaggart. "Just let me lay my hands on the cackling—"

"I'm going to try shooting at the sound!" snapped Blake, and he let fly with shot after shot downwards through the open square in the floor.

The mad laughter ceased abruptly.

"Have you got him?" whispered Tinker, in the aching silence that followed the crashing shots. "He's quiet now."

But, to kill their hopes, a sinister, all-too-familiar voice came echoing from below.

"Save your bullets, Sexton Blake. It's no use—they won't penetrate four inches of oak. Besides—I have the protection of the iron mask!"

"Just you wait till I get out o' here!" choked McTaggart savagely, but the jeering voice cut in:

"But you won't get out—you won't get out!"

It was at that very instant that a faint crackling sound reached their ears, and their nostrils were assailed by the pungent whiff of burning straw.

"The mill is burning"—the voice was indescribably gloating—"and you will burn with it!"

The murderer ended with another of his horrible peals of mask-bound laughter.

"The fiend—we're trapped—look, guv'nor—flames!" cried Tinker.

Below them the hideous laughter pealed on.

"We've got tae get out! There must be some way out!" shouted McTaggart.

Blake's voice was tense as he replied.

"It looks very much to me as if we have to choose between breaking our necks by jumping or staying here to burn!"

Then, from below, the voice of the Man in the Iron Mask came again.

"Burn! You shall burn, Sexton Blake! And any secrets this mill may hold shall burn with you!"

And in a fading peal of horrible laughter, the three in the loft sensed their enemy's retreat.

Around them the smoke thickened. The spreading flames were already throwing up their heat through the chinky floor. The growing crackle of devouring fire roared in their ears. McTaggart started to cough.

"He shan't beat us—he mustn't, guv'nor!" gasped Tinker. "There's some way out—isn't there, guv'nor?"

It wasn't only smoke that moistened Blake's eyes. Even in this hell-hole, in the midst of this fearful inferno, Tinker's faith in his beloved guv'nor did not fail.

"If there's a way, we'll find it, old son!" Blake choked.

But though his keen brain worked swiftly, no brightening ray of hope came.

Would Tinker's faith in him be in vain? For the first time, and the last—

### The Fury of the Fire

ED fire danced and crackled among the rotting timbers of Cawtry's Mill.

R The Man in the Iron Mask took a last look at the blazing terror his hand had wrought, and threw his head back in a peal of crazy laughter.

He stooped amid the eddying smoke that billowed about him and tugged open the big trapdoor at his feet. Below were stairs—stairs that lost themselves in subterranean blackness.

A wisp of smoke caught at his throat and choked his unholy laughter into a sudden cough. He gasped it out of his lungs as he stepped on to the stairs.

"Burn, Sexton Blake, burn!" His sepulchral voice was venomous with evil triumph. "You've met your match this time, Sexton Blake. Raging fire shall be your grave!"

A swirl of smoke made him gasp again as he poured out his hatred. A beam, crackling with orange fire, came crashing down from the floor above him.

Like a black Satan descending to some lower inferno, the Man in the Iron Mask withdrew from the fiery chaos his hand had wrought.

A blacker thing in the blackness of the tunnel, he hurried back towards the vaults under the castle of Sainte Marguerite.

In the big, flag-floored kitchen of Sainte

Marguerite, Tony Carradine and Joan were making coffee and cutting sandwiches.

Joan brushed back her red-gold hair and sighed.

"Oh, how I envy the cook and those two housemaids, Tony. They're out of this terrible place, safe from the Man in the Iron Mask. Tony, do you think Inspector McTaggart will let us leave here, just for a little while? We'd come back again if he wanted us. I mean, he knows we had nothing to do with this mur— with this horrible business."

"I'll ask him, dear," replied Carradine. "You're looking a little bit peaked; it'd do you good to get away from here for an hour or two. But we'll have to wait until Mac gets back. He's off with Blake and Tinker, searching those secret passages. Wonder if he's found anything yet?"

"Sometimes I almost hope he never finds anything." Joan's voice had become very small. "Tony, do you realize that when he does find out something, it will probably mean that somebody we know will have to hang—for murder!"

Tony nodded.

"It's not a nice thought, old thing. I've told myself time and again that this Man in the Iron Mask is some outsider, some crazy killer who has found his way into the castle, perhaps by the very passages that Blake and Tinker and McTaggart are searching now. But I don't really believe it, Joan. McTaggart suspects Benito and Angus—and Siboku. I think he even suspected me a little, and Uncle Peter, before uncle himself was attacked this afternoon. And, somehow, you know, Joan, I can't see that poor heathen, Siboku, in the role of murderer. He was devoted to Uncle Angelo. I'm afraid it'll turn out in the end that either cousin Benito or old Angus is the Man in the Iron Mask."

"It must be some awful madness that possesses them," breathed Joan. "Oh, Tony, it's horrible!"

"I know." Tony spoke very gently. "But keep your chin up. Nothing can happen now. McTaggart left things pretty safe when he went off with Blake on this tunnel hunt of theirs. Everybody else in the house except us is in separate rooms, up on the first floor, and old Holly, McTaggart's constable, is patrolling the floor with orders to look in on each of them at regular intervals. That doesn't give our murderer in his iron mask much of a chance—unless he wants to give himself away."

Joan nodded.

"I suppose Uncle Peter's resting now, after his adventure in the chimney. He hasn't come down from his room since."

"That's where he'll be, all right," Tony agreed. "Hey—look out for your milk, old thing! It's boiling over!"

"Drat!" Joan snatched the pan of milk off the hot hob and let it simmer down. For the next few minutes the two were fully occupied in loading up their tray with the coffee set and the pile of sandwiches which Tony had cut.

"All set?" asked Tony.

"Mmm; that's got everything, I think. Will you carry the tray, Tony? I'll follow on with the coffee-pot. It'll fall over on the tray."

Tony led the way out of the kitchen, towards the corridor that led through to the great hall.

"I'll bet old Holly's eyes'll light up at the sight of these sandwiches," commented Carradine, "and those three hungry hunters, Blake, Tinker, and McTaggart, won't turn their noses up at a snack, either."

"If they don't hurry back this coffee'll be cold," observed Joan.

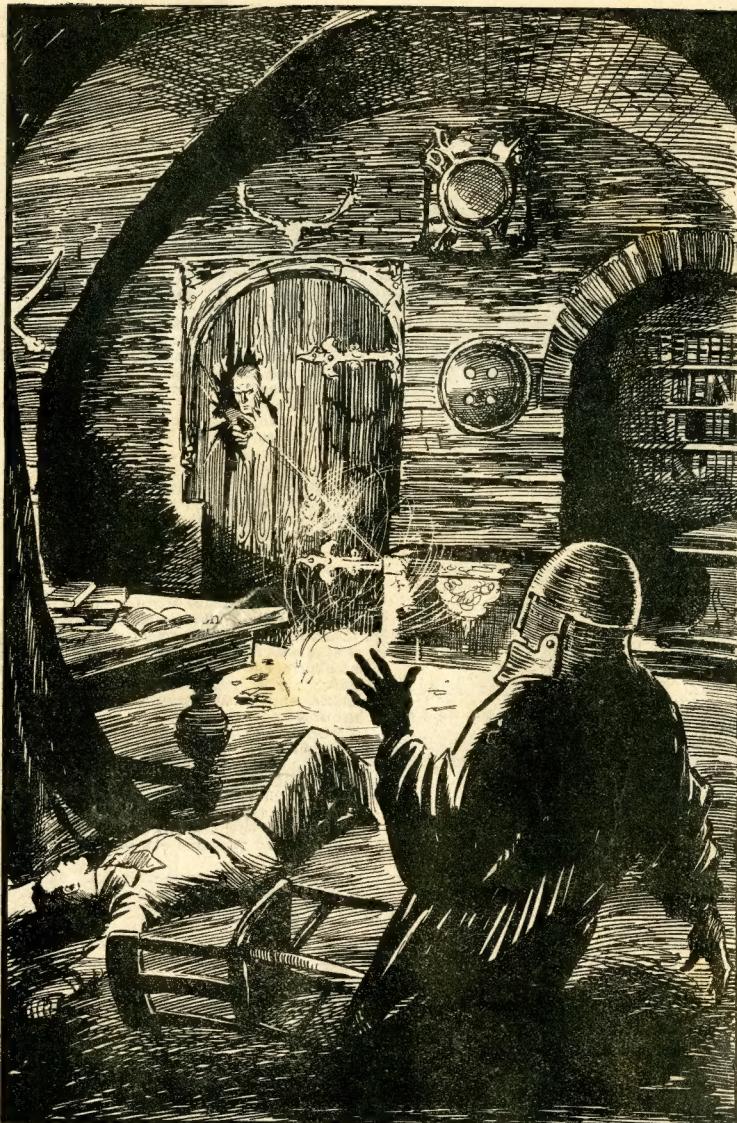
"They'll be back soon, don't you worry. By the time we've carted this stuff around to the others. We'll go up to the library—it's cosiest there."

"Mmm! Now wait a second, Tony. You'll drop that tray if you try opening doors," admonished Joan. "I've got a hand free; let me do it."

They had reached the oaken door that barred the way through to the great hall. Obediently Tony waited while Joan preceded him, and pushed it open.

Joan turned and backed up flat against the big door to hold it open, and to allow Tony to pass. From this position she could see one corner of the vast room, including a part of the stairs that led up to the gallery. She gave a sudden, tight-throated cry, and the coffee-pot crashed from her hand to the floor.

"Tony!" Tense-fingered, the girl's hand flew to her mouth. "Over there—on the stairs!"



Through the hole he had smashed in the door, Sexton Blake had a clear view of the scene within. Tony Carradine inert on the library floor. Poised over him, the black-clad form of the murderer. Blake squeezed the trigger.

Carradine glanced across at the flight of stone steps. Sprawled upon them in full view was the body of a man.

"Gosh, it's Holly!"

Tony set the tray down with a crashing tinkle of toppled crockery, and raced across the hall.

More slowly and fearfully Joan followed. Her slim hand clutched at the throat of her dress and seemed somehow to choke back the awful sobbing laughter that was trying to force itself up and out of her slender throat.

"He's—dead?"

The girl's words were half a question, half a statement.

Tony was bending over the inert figure, feeling for the heart-beat. He shook his head decisively.

"No, he's not dead!" Carradine's voice was curt, but strong and comforting to the trembling girl: "not that somebody hasn't had a darned good try to kill him. He's had an awful crack on the head. Here, help me to get him off these steps and down on to that big settee. You take his feet."

Joan's fearfulness had vanished now, driven away by the advent of something that she could usefully do. Her heels clicked swiftly up the

stairs, and she grasped the constable's ankles and lifted.

"Easy does it!" breathed Tony.

Together they carried their unconscious burden to the big settee, and placed him gently upon it.

"He's a concussion case for certain!" murmured Carradine, looking down at the unfortunate Holly, who was breathing stertorously through his mouth. "Get a towel soaked in cold water, and put it on his head. That's all we can do until a doctor gets here. Luckily Blake's around somewhere—he's a medico—"

Joan had gone before Tony's words were finished. In a very short space of time she was back with the sopping towel, which they placed gently around Holly's head.

"Tony," said Joan, in a small, questioning voice, "it's the Man in the Iron Mask again, isn't it?"

"Yes!" Tony's voice was tense and angry. "Heaven alone knows what fiendish work that monster may be doing even now!"

"Listen!" Joan's cry was sharp and urgent. From somewhere away in the distance came the eerie cadence of a pipe-tune.

"It—it's the pipes. These same pipes that

Blake heard! It must be the same!" breathed Carradine.

"Datu pipes—Siboku's pipes!" whispered Joan.

The distant music accelerated to a crescendo. Then it stopped suddenly, as though something had happened to interrupt the player.

With one accord Tony and Joan hurried across to the high, latticed window, and gazed out.

"It seemed to come from over there, across the lake shore!" exclaimed the girl.

"Yes, from Cawtry Mill way. I—"

Tony broke off suddenly as the sound of six rapid shots cracked clearly across the lake on the still evening air.

Dumbfounded by this sudden dramatic development, the two stood gazing out across the now placid waters of the lake. Cawtry Mill stood like some giant sentinel on the brow of the rise beyond the western shore. Then suddenly from the dark bulk of the mill leaped the orange brightness of sudden flame.

"The mill's on fire!" cried Tony. "What can be—"

His voice trailed away as the obvious thought struck him. Joan spoke it for him.

"The Man in the Iron Mask. Could it be—"

"Joan, you're right! He's at his devil's work again." Carradine's voice was ringing with anger. "Listen, my dear. I don't know what has happened over there at the mill, but this is my chance to find out who the Man in the Iron Mask is. I'm going upstairs to find out who is in his room—and who isn't. We'll get him this time!" Carradine was tugging something from his pocket as he spoke. "Here, you'd better stay down here in the hall with Holly, but take this gun. It's loaded—and don't be afraid to use it if anyone—if anything happens. If anything does happen while I'm gone, scream and shoot. I won't be far off, and I'll hear you!"

Tony pressed the flat blue automatic into Joan's small hand and kissed her lightly on the cheek. Then he was gone, taking the stone steps three at a time.

"Be careful, my darling!" breathed Joan softly, more to herself than after him. "Come back to me—safely!"

### Hot Work

THE four-hundred-year-old timbers of Cawtry Mill were blazing furiously. In the loft, Sexton Blake, Tinker, and McTaggart coughed and choked in the ever-gathering clouds of relentless smoke. With every second that passed, the plight of the three trapped men grew worse and

worse. Sexton Blake's keen grey eyes flicked this way and that, taking in every detail of the place, and assessing its value in terms of one thing—escape.

"If only the sails of the mill were still intact!" he gasped, as he leaned from the tiny square window. "They'd be almost as good as a ladder to the ground!" He leaned far from the window in an endeavour to see as much as possible of what lay around the foot of the mill. Suddenly he gave a sharp cry.

"By heaven, if we can get up on to the roof of this mill there's a chance for us yet!" He spun round swiftly. "Tear the thatching of the roof away—make a hole in it!" he snapped, and himself set to work. The other two followed suit.

"What is it? What did ye see?" choked McTaggart.

"There's a pond—or, rather, the remains of one—on the other side of the mill!" returned Blake, saving his breath as much as possible. "We'll face it if we can get on to the roof of the mill on this side!"

"You mean we could dive?" cried Tinker, and even the asphyxiating smoke failed to keep the eagerness from his voice.

"Yes!" said Blake. "But I warn you, that pond may be two feet of mud, and nothing else. It's long odds against deep water, but it'll be softer than the ground and with fifty feet to drop it's our only chance of life!" Blake's words ended in a fit of coughing as the smoke caught at his throat. "Confound! This hole in the roof will act as a first-rate chimney. The smoke'll simply rush through once there's a way clear, but we've got to do it!"

For some seconds there was no sound but their gasping breath as they worked feverishly to tear a hole in the ancient straw thatching. At first it was difficult to tug out any of the straw at all from below, but as the breach they were making grew steadily larger, the task became easier, until at last they were ripping it out in armfuls.

Up you go, Mac!" choked Blake.

"Thanks!" McTaggart gave Blake a grateful nod as he reached upwards. The great detective had realised that the Scots inspector would probably have a lot of difficulty in getting up through the roof by his own unaided efforts.

"Use my back. Give him a punk up, Tinker." McTaggart vanished through the smoke-filled hole.

"Up, Tinker!" snapped Blake. Tinker took a short jump and heaved himself agilely out into the open air. Blake followed with a single easy tug of his long, sinewy arms.

Outside the air was fresher, free of the

choking burden of smoke. The three drew in grateful breaths. McTaggart looked around him.

"Losh!" he gasped. "Is yon puddle the pond you were talking about?"

"It is," said Blake grimly. "I warned you that it wasn't very big, but it's better than nothing. The sides of the mill are far too steep to climb down, and, anyway, they're blazing like Hades. That pond does give us a slim chance. If there's only a couple of feet of mud, and nothing else—"

Blake shrugged eloquently. Then:

"I'll go first and sample it."

"No, guv'nor—let me!" cut in Tinker.

Blake shook his head.

"No, Tinker—orders!"

"Guv'nor—"

"Hey—you two aren't the only ones who can be noble!" returned McTaggart. "I'm the oldest—I've had most o' ma life—"

"No!" cried Tinker. "Let—"

But at that instant there was a brief chuckle from Sexton Blake, a muttered "Au'voir!" and the great investigator was gone!

"Guv'nor!" Tinker watched his chief's unerring dive, straight for the centre of the small, boggy pond, and his heart was in his mouth.

Blake hit the water perfectly, with a sharp, cleaving splash. Tinker saw him use his hands as deflectors, to bring his dive rapidly to the surface. An instant later, Blake was crawling out, smothered from head to foot in mud and slime.

He dashed the mud away from his mouth, and shouted up to them.

"All right, you two; there's about five feet of water, and heaven knows how much mud!"

"You next, Mac!" urged Tinker.

McTaggart grunted.

"I suppose you'll just argue all day if I don't. Well, here goes! I'm a gosh-awful diver, at that!"

Tinker grinned as McTaggart went off the edge, arms and legs waving in all directions. The inspector hit the water with a tremendous smack, feet first, and instinctively Tinker winced back as the mighty splash of muddy water shot up towards him. He waited a short while, as McTaggart, assisted by Sexton Blake, scrambled out of the pond, and then he went off the edge of the mill roof in a smooth, crisp dive. He hit the water cleanly, and at once turned his hands to deflect his dive. He felt the clinging drag of the swirled-up mud of the pond bottom, then he shot up into daylight again. As he scrambled out the mid-structure of the mill collapsed in a roaring crackle of angry fire.

"We'd have been goners if we'd wasted another minute," murmured McTaggart. "I'll no' be complainin' about the smack yon water gave me—tis worth it now!"

"Yes, we've had a narrow escape from a nasty death!" said Blake grimly. "But the fiend who engineered this death-trap is still free. Mac—we've got to get back to Sainte Marguerite. Heaven alone knows what's happening there while we're absent. What precautions did you take before we left?"

"I left Benito, Angus, and Siboku—and Mr. Peter, too, for that matter—in separate rooms. My constable, Holly, has orders to visit each of them at regular intervals, so we'll know if—

McTaggart broke off sharply, and his jaw dropped. "Losh! Somethin' must 'a happened already back at the castle. One o' those four must be the Man in the Iron Mask—and the Man in the Iron Mask was here! What's Holly doin'? I'll—"

"I fear that Holly, too, may have suffered attack at the hands of this madman!" interrupted Blake. "Though, on the other hand, it is just possible that nothing at all has happened back at the castle."

"What d'you mean?"

"I mean that our discovery of the tunnel leading under the lake from the vaults of the castle to Cawtry Mill here makes it just possible that our murderer may not be one of our suspects at the castle!"

"That's right," agreed Tinker. "Anybody knowing about that tunnel and the secret passages in the castle would be able to come and go as they liked!"

"A nice, cheery thought!" growled McTaggart morosely. "Just as I thought we'd got the suspects narrowed to four, you go and prove that anyone in Northumberland might have hopped across and done the job!"

Sexton Blake seemed hardly to hear the inspector's words. His keen grey eyes were

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narrowed and his voice was low, as he made his observation, almost to himself.

"And yet it seems to me that one of those four must be our murderer. There is only one hypothesis that fits all the facts, and that does not admit the possibility of outside interference. The hypothesis is absolute, and yet the final proof is lacking. One thing I must discover—why was Angelo Marthioli killed? Why did the Man in the Iron Mask kill him, of all people? Friendly, inoffensive, penniless Angelo. What motive could inspire his murder? That I must know—or murder will go unpunished!"

Blake suddenly spun on his heel, and his mood of reverie dropped from him.

"Mac—we've got to get back to the castle quickly. The tunnel under the lake's impassable because the burning mill blocks the way. Where is the nearest boat?"

"There'll be one over yonder, at the headland across the water there!" McTaggart pointed away across a sort of bay formed by the curving lake-shore.

"Half a mile at least, and over broken ground." Blake was reckoning out the chances. "Five minutes to get there, and another ten to get across, if we row hard. From here we could swim it in ten minutes."

"Maybe you could!" growled the inspector, "but I swim like a leaky brick!"

"Then we'll have to go on without you!" snapped Blake. "The feeling grows upon me that all is not well at Sainte Marguerite; there is no time to be lost. Follow as fast as you can in the boat. Tinker and I will swim. Off with your coat, laddie!"

"O.K., guv'nor!"

There were twin splashes as Sexton Blake and Tinker took clean racing dives off the rocky foreshore into the water. McTaggart had already started at a steady jog-trot for the distant promontory, where he knew he would find a boat moored.

"I only hope nobody's hidden the cars!" he growled to himself, as he ploughed away.

Dusk was falling rapidly over the lake of Sainte Marguerite.

### Face to Face

THE high, mullioned window of the library of Sainte Marguerite faces almost due west.

The red light of this day's setting sun shafted cleanly across the silent, empty room. The shadowy tallness of packed bookcases gloomed over the forms of old furniture.

Full in the red light of the dying day was the big, cold, open hearth. Here was a stage set for melodrama—here was a celestial spotlight focused for the entry of a grim principal—the Man in the Iron Mask.

Amid the stillness came a faint rumble, a rumble which grew and increased as the limestone hearth-slab rose slowly out of its bed.

Now the rumble defined itself into the creak of ancient chains, and the squeak of old, iron pulleys. Something of the ingenuity of the architectural conspirator who had designed this device became apparent as the light fell upon the four columns of age-blackened, hammered iron that were urging the stone slab upwards.

From this fit setting the head and shoulders of the Man in the Iron Mask thrust themselves. Black-cloaked and sinister, the form of the murderer rose into the peacefulness of the library, and walked the room as one who had walked it often.

Behind him the hearth slab dropped back into place.

The Man in the Iron Mask stood looking out into the gathering twilight. Slowly his arms rose on either side of him, and his outstretched fingers clasped themselves among the folds of the heavy plush curtains that bracketed the window.

Black and monstrous, his shadow stretched across the room behind him.

Then he began to laugh.

It was horrible, subdued laughter—laughter that pulsed in his throat, and echoed eerily under the mask—laughter that made his shoulders shake and rustled the sable folds of his long cloak.

"Thus and thus do my enemies fall! Thus have I crushed the almighty Sexton Blake!" The words grew out of the same sepulchral rumble that was his laughter. "Now is my purpose achieved. It remains only for the Man in the

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Iron Mask to vanish—to die!" The last two words came in a soft gasp of speculation. Then he repeated the words, louder, as they suggested to him the logical conclusion of his own thoughts. "To die! But, of course! If the Man in the Iron Mask were to attack me—and if I were to prevail, and his body were to be found below upon the rocks, wearing this mask, and this black cloak—what more fitting end could the busybodies of the law desire—what more fitting end could I desire—for with Sexton Blake already dead, no man lives who can tell my secret! So shall it be. So—shall—it—be!" His voice dropped into an echoing whisper. "Whom shall I choose? Who shall play the rôle of the Man in the Iron Mask when he takes his last bow? For it shall not be my features that are seen, when the mask is taken off—for—the—last time!"

And the Man in the Iron Mask began to laugh again, his iron-clad head thrown back, his shoulders shaking; softly and horribly, his evil mirth echoed across the library.

Then the big door crashed open. The Man in the Iron Mask spun about.

"Aaaaah!" His sharply indrawn breath was like the snarl of a cornered beast, as he found himself face to face with Tony Carradine.

Tony's face was pale, but his mouth was set in a firm line as he faced the killer.

"Found you!" snapped Tony. "Cornered you at last—murderer that you are! You'll not escape now!"

Tony pushed the door quickly shut, turned the key behind his back, and slipped it into his pocket.

"The door is locked. You'll not get out of here. It's man now!"

The Man in the Iron Mask had not moved. He stood there, his shoulders heaving, as he breathed in great panting gasps. Then, as Tony advanced grimly upon him, he acted.

One hand snatched at the back of a heavy carved chair and swung it up off the floor. His other hand joined the first as the chair swung upwards, and all the force of both arms gave itself to that murderous downward arc.

But Tony Carradine saw it coming. He ducked and sprang in the same split second, and plunged himself into the whirling folds of the black cloak.

The chair passed harmlessly down behind his back, and splintered crashingly upon the floor.

Carradine heard the murderer gasp as his head took him in the stomach. The Man in the Iron Mask staggered back a pace with the impact of Tony's charge. Then he let his knees fold under him and dropped backwards to the floor. Tony came down with him, on top of him.

As he fell, the murderer jack-knifed his knees upwards. Then, as his back struck the black oak floor, he straightened his legs with all the force he could muster.

Tony felt those two feet drive savagely into his groin. They lifted him sharply, and he found himself somersaulting away, thrown clear of his foe by the murderer's thrusting legs.

The Man in the Iron Mask whirled to his feet with a harsh gasp of laughter. As Tony crashed into a chair and sent it spinning, his attacking pounce began.

Carradine saw light flash blindingly against the corner of the chair-seat. Then, like some great black eagle, the Man in the Iron Mask drove down upon him.

Carradine was conscious of something hot and moist welling over his head. Savage hands clawed for his throat. Those hands were breaking through at him, however much he strove to fight them off, to keep them away from his throat. Grimly, gamely, Tony fought back in a world that reeled and tottered, fought to hang on to the last shreds of his consciousness, fought to keep those clawing fingers from crushing his windpipe. He tried to cry out, but only a choked gurgle came.

The Man in the Iron Mask began to laugh.

### "Is He Dead?"

SAINTE MARGUERITE had first appeared to Joan Dixon as a wonderful old place. Now, alone in the vastness of the great hall, she hated it.

Somewhere within its thick granite walls was a murderer—a man she knew, who killed.

Who was it? Benito—waspish, vindictive, and sour of soul? Or old Angus, who ranted and raved about ghosts and hauntings, who looked as if he had stepped out of a book by Harrison Ainsworth, and to whom the Man in the Iron Mask had always been almost a reality? Or Siboku, who had been the servant of the murdered Angelo Marthioli, and who carried with him all the aura of a savage East that the white Westerner can never fathom. Siboku had admitted that his master had told him all the strange history of the iron mask. Suppose that in his savage mind he had somehow made a god of the iron mask and appointed himself its high priest to exact the sacrifices it demanded?

Nightmarish imaginings chased each other through Joan's brain. Suppose even that Tony's Uncle Peter was the Man in the Iron Mask? He

*Continued overleaf.*

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## A CASE FOR SEXTON BLAKE

Continued from previous page.

was the eldest of the family, the head of the house. Perhaps in some queer secret way the iron mask was passed on, from eldest son to eldest son—and so had been handed down from the dawn of the eighteenth century, when Count Aldo Marthioly had died in the Bastille, with the foul mask locked upon his head, where it had rested for twenty-four long years. Perhaps it was the duty of the eldest son of the House of Marthioly to prowl abroad casqued in the mask of iron, to exact vengeance by murder for the sufferings of his ancestor. But that was fantastic. Hadn't Peter Marthioly himself suffered a murderous attack that very afternoon? No, it couldn't be Uncle Peter!

And then Joan told herself that murderers often fake attacks upon themselves to divert suspicion. She found herself in the sudden grip of a horror at the weightiness of her own fancyings.

When poor Holly, stretched out upon the couch, stirred slightly and groaned, Joan started wildly.

Her thoughts had carried her so far away, had taken her along such a strange and frightening path of speculation, that she had almost forgotten the unfortunate constable left in her charge. And because every nerve was tense, there was menace in every single sound. Joan glanced about her anxiously.

Then, realising whence the noise had come, she hurried to the side of the injured man.

His breathing was still uneven, and his head had lolled uncomfortably to one side. Joan took it gently in her hands and lifted it.

"Poor Holly!" she breathed. "We'll soon have you right when Mr. Blake gets back. He—he will come back—soon, now!"

The mere mention of Blake's name had brought new fears flooding to Joan's mind. Where was Blake?

Through the window the girl could see the flicker of the burning mill.

"The mill's burning, Holly—Cawtry Mill," she whispered; "but that couldn't have anything to do with Mr. Blake."

Joan gasped—almost screamed aloud—as a voice answered her words:

"Mill burn—Siboku not like!"

"Siboku!" cried Joan. "Don't come any nearer! See—I've got a gun! What are you doing here?"

"Mill burn!" repeated Siboku. "Siboku live in mill many days. Tuan Angelo, he take Siboku to mill."

"Angelo Marthioly took you to the mill? You lived there? But why—" Joan broke off as a crash sounded from somewhere upstairs. "What was that?"

A second crashing thud followed the first.

"Something's happening to—" began Joan, near-panic in her voice. Then came a second sudden interruption.

Thunderous knocking crashed upon her ears from the front door.

Joan hesitated, torn between the impulse to rush upstairs and find out if Tony was safe and

the thought that it might be Blake at the door. Then:

"Open that door, Siboku—quickly!" Siboku obeyed, and the massive oak door cracked open.

"Tuan Blake!" he cried. Sexton Blake and Tinker, soaked to the skin after their swim across the lake, snapped into the room.

"Mr. Blake! Thank Heaven you're back!" There was a sob of relief in the girl's words.

"What's happening?" demanded Blake, as his eyes took in the scene in the hall. "Hallo! Holly laid out? How—"

Joan cut into his words:

"Mr. Blake, something's happening to Tony—I'm certain! He's upstairs. I'm afraid—"

At that moment peal after peal of horrible laughter echoed through the castle.

"The Man in the Iron Mask!" snapped Blake. "Come on, Tinker! That came from the library. Perhaps we'll catch him red-handed!"

Blake tore up the stone stairs three at a time, with Tinker hard at his heels. He was tugging out his gun from his hip pocket as he ran.

They reached the library door together. From within sounded the unmistakable laughter of the Man in the Iron Mask!

Blake hurled himself at the door.

"Locked!" he grunted, and at once started to batter a panel with the butt of his gun.

"Find something to break down the whole door, Tinker!" he called. "I can only smash a panel, but that'll be enough to shoot through!"

"O.K., guv'nor!" cried Tinker, and sprinted away.

The mad laughter had ceased abruptly with Blake's first chop at the panel. As Joan Dixon, white and panting, appeared, Blake made a breach in the door.

Through the hole he could see the scene within.

Tony, inert upon the floor. Poised over him the black-clad form of the murderer.

"Aaaaaa! The Man in the Iron Mask!" Joan screamed. "Shoot him! He's killed Tony!"

Blake's arm prodded through the opening. He squeezed the trigger.

The first shot missed and Blake fired again.

There was a sharp click—nothing more.

The water had got at the bullets!

Again and again the firing hammer fell as Blake yanked and yanked at the trigger in vain.

The Man in the Iron Mask cackled with insane laughter.

"So we meet again, Blake! A case of greeting and farewell, I fear!" And then he whirled out of their range of vision, leaving Tony on the floor.

"He's gone—he's gone—and he's killed Tony!" Joan sobbed, just as Tinker arrived with a studded iron club.

"Here y're, guv'nor—the mace from the suit of armour along the passage!"

Sexton Blake snatched it from him, and swung it at the door of the library. There was a splintering, rending crash as the sixty-pound head of the iron club smote the door with all the speed and force that Blake's lean, sinewy arms could put behind it.

None the less, the door withstood three mighty



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blows, but it burst inwards in a shower of splinters under the final assault.

Blake hurtled into the room, with the club in his hand. Tinker was close behind him. Joan Dixon flung herself towards the prostrate form of Tony Carradine.

"The Man in the Iron Mask—he's gone!" gasped Tinker.

"Tony! Tony! O-oh, Tony!" Joan Dixon was sobbing brokenly.

Blake's eyes flashed angrily as he surveyed the room. Then he let the club fall with a thud to the floor and wheeled towards Joan. He dropped on to one knee beside her.

"Here, let me look at him," he said gently.

For a long moment he bent over Carradine. Joan's distress was unrestrained now. The sight of Tony, inert upon the floor, with the blood welling from a gash in his head, had broken her self-control at last.

"Aren't—aren't you going after his—murderer? Why don't you do something?"

Blake straightened his head.

"I can't," he said gently. "Because I would prefer to save Tony's life rather than avenge its loss. There's just a chance that I can save him, if I work fast. Tinker—that big cushion—bunch it up and push it under his shoulders." Joan's sobbing had ended now as she hung upon his words. "That's it." Blake settled the injured man gently on to the cushion, and then grasped his shoulders firmly and thrust them downwards. "He's had a nasty bang on the head, and he's been more than half strangled, but artificial respiration may pull him back!"

"Oh, thank Heaven!" breathed Joan.

Blake worked grimly, thrusting the shoulders back and then releasing them at regular intervals. Then he spoke again:

"And while I do this a murderer goes free. I can do nothing! But you can, Tinker. Get going and check up on the rest of the people in the place. Find out who isn't in his room!"

Tinker was gone almost before Blake had finished speaking.

Blake persevered grimly at his task.

Was ever a man in a more maddening position? His quarry was almost within his grasp, and yet, because there was a life at stake, he must let the murderer go. For the moment he was helpless, but his resolution was unshaken.

"This I swear!" he breathed. "The Man in the Iron Mask shall surrender to the law before the sun sets again!"

Blake's face was white and set as he murmured the words.

**Who is the Man in the Iron Mask? What is his motive? Continue this terrific serial in next Thursday's DETECTIVE WEEKLY, and listen to the Radio Play every Tuesday.**

